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SOUTH WIND

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SOUTH WIND

BY NORMAN · DOUGLAS

EDITION · ILLUSTRATED
BY JOHN AUSTEN

ARGUS BOOKS
CHICAGO · 1929

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SOUTH WIND

Volume II

Chapter XXIII

The cannon, to be hereinafter described, is not the sole surviving relic of the Good Duke's rule. Turn where you please on his island domain, memories of that charming and incisive personality will meet your eye and ear; memories in stone—schools, convents, decayed castles and bathing chalets; memories in the spoken word—proverbs attributed to him, legends and traditions of his sagacity that still linger among the populace. *In the days of the Duke:* so runs a local saying, much as we speak of the "good old times." His amiable laughter-loving ghost pervades the capital to this hour. His pleasantries still resound among those crumbling theatres and galleries. That gleeful devilry of his, compounded of blood and sunshine, is the epitome of Nepenthe. He is the scarlet thread running through its annals. An incarnation of all that was best in the age, he identified, for well nigh half a century, his interests with those of his faithful subjects.

He meditated no conquests. It sufficed him to gain and to retain the affection of men in whose eyes he was not so much a prince, a feudal lord, as an indulgent and doting father. He was the ideal despot, a man of wide culture and simple tastes. "A smile," he used to say, "will sway the Universe." Simplicity he declared to be the keynote of his nature, the guiding motive of his governance. In exemplification whereof he would point to his method of collecting taxes—a marvel of simplicity. Each citizen paid what he liked. If the sum proved insufficient he was apprised of the fact next morning by having his left hand amputated; a second error of judgment—it happened rather seldom—was rectified by the mutilation of the remaining member. "Never argue with inferiors," was one of His Highness's most original and pregnant remarks, and it was observed that, whether he condescended to argue or not, he generally gained his point without undue loss of time.

"It's so simple," he would say to those perplexed potentates who flocked to him from the mainland for advice on administrative questions. "So simple! One knock to each nail. And keep smiling."

It was the Good Duke Alfred who, with a shrewd eye to the future prosperity of his dominions, made the first practical experiments with those hot mineral springs—those healing waters whose virtues, up till then, had been unaccountably neglected. Realizing their curative possibilities, he selected fifty of the oldest and wisest of his Privy Councillors to

undergo a variety of hydro-thermal tests on their bodies, internal and external. Seven of these gentlemen had the good luck to survive the treatment. They received the Order of the Golden Vine, a coveted distinction. The remaining forty-three, what was left of them, were cremated at nighttime and posthumously ennobled.

He was the author of some mighty fine dissertations on falconry, dancing, and architecture. He wrote furthermore, in the flamboyant style of his period, two dozen pastoral plays, as well as a goodly number of verses addressed, for the most part, to ladies of his Court—a Court which was thronged with poets, wits, philosophers and noble women. The island was a gay place in those days! There was always something doing. His Highness had a trick of casting favourites into dungeons, and concubines into the sea, that endeared him to his various legitimate spouses; and the rapidity with which these self-same spouses were beheaded one after the other, to make room for what he mirthfully called "fresh blood," struck his faithful subjects as an ever-recurring miracle of state-craft. "Nothing," he used to say to his intimates, "nothing ages a man like living always with the same woman." Well aware, on the other hand, of the inequality of social conditions and keenly desirous of raising the moral tone of his people, he framed iron laws to restrain those irregularities of married life which had been a disreputable feature of local society prior to his accession.

Not in vain had he pondered in youth the political maxims of the great Florentine. He cultivated assiduously the friendship of Church and Mob; he knew that no throne, however seemingly well established, can weather the blasts of fortune save by resting on those twin pillars of security. So it came about that, while all Europe was convulsed in savage warfare, his relations with other rulers were marked by rare cordiality and simplicity of intercourse. He never failed to conciliate his more powerful neighbours by timely gifts of local delicacies—gifts of dark-eyed virgins to grace their palaces, and frequent hampers of those succulent *langoustes* for which the coastal waters of the island are renowned, both items of the finest quality obtainable. A born statesman, he extended this ingratiating demeanour even to those minor sovereigns from whom, to all appearances, he had nothing to fear, supplying them likewise with periodical consignments of pretty maidens and well-flavoured crayfish, only of somewhat inferior quality—the crustaceans often too young, the damsels occasionally over-ripe.

His high aspirations made him the precursor of many modern ideas. In educational and military matters, more especially, he ranks as a pioneer. He was a pedagogue by natural instinct. He took a sincere delight in the school-children, limited their weekly half-holidays to five, designed becoming dresses for boys and girls, decreed that lute playing and deportment should become obligatory subjects

in the curriculum, and otherwise reformed the scholastic calendar which, before his day, had drifted into sad confusion and laxity. Sometimes he honoured the ceremony of prize-giving with his presence. On the other hand it must be admitted that, judged by modern standards, certain of his methods for punishing disobedience smack of downright pedantry. Thrice a year, on receiving from the Ministry of Education a list containing the names of unsatisfactory scholars of either sex, it was his custom to hoist a flag on a certain hill-top; this was a signal for the Barbary pirates, who then infested the neighbouring ocean, to set sail for the island and buy up these perverse children, at purely nominal rates, for the slave-markets of Stamboul and Argier. They were sold ignominiously—by weight and not by the piece—to mark his unqualified disapproval of talking and scribbling on blotting-pads during school hours.

It is recorded of the Good Duke that on one occasion he returned from the scene looking haggard and careworn, as though the sacrifice of so many young lives weighed on his fatherly spirit. Presently, envisaging his duties towards the State, he restrained these natural but unworthy emotions, smiled his well-known smile, and gave utterance to an apophthegm which has since found its way into a good many copybooks: "In the purity of childhood," he said, "lie the seeds of national prosperity." And if it be enquired by what arts of Machiavellian astuteness he alone, of all Christian princes,

contrived to maintain friendly relations with these formidable Oriental sea-rovers, the answer lies at hand. His device was one of extreme simplicity. He appealed to their better natures by sending them, at convenient intervals, shiploads of local delicacies, girls and lobsters—of indifferent quality, it is true, but sufficiently appetising to attest his honourable intentions.

His predecessors, intent only upon their pleasures, had given no thought to the possibility of a hostile invasion of their fair domain. But the Good Duke, despite his popularity, was frequently heard to quote with approval that wise old adage which runs "In peace, prepare for war." Convinced of the instability of all mundane affairs and being, moreover, a man of original notions as well as something of an artist in costumery, he was led to create that picturesque body of men, the local Militia, which survives to this day and would alone entitle him to the grateful notice of posterity. These elegant warriors, he calculated, would serve both for the purpose of infusing terror into the minds of potential enemies, and of acting as a decorative bodyguard to enhance his own public appearances on gala days. He threw his whole soul into the enterprise. After the corps had been duly established, he amused himself by drilling them on Sunday afternoons and modelling new buttons for their uniforms; to give them the requisite military stamina he over-fed and starved them by turns, wrapped them in sheepskin overcoats for long route-marches

in July, exercised them in sham fights with live grapeshot and unblunted stilettos and otherwise thinned their ranks of undesirables, and hardened their physique, by forcing them to escalade horrible precipices at midnight on horseback. He was a martinet; he knew it; he gloried in the distinction. "All the world loves a disciplinarian," he was wont to say.

Nevertheless, like many great princes, he realized that political reasons might counsel at times an abatement of rigour. He could relent and show mercy. He could interpose his authority in favour of the condemned.

He relented on one celebrated occasion which more than any other helped to gain for him the epithet of "The Good"—when an entire squadron of the Militia was condemned to death for some supposed mistake in giving the salute. The record, unfortunately, is somewhat involved in obscurity and hard to disentangle; so much is clear, however, that the sentence was duly promulgated and carried into effect within half an hour. Then comes the moot question of the officer in command who was obviously destined for execution with the rest of his men and who now profited, as events proved, by the clemency of the Good Duke. It appears that this individual, noted for a childlike horror of bloodshed (especially when practised on his own person) had unaccountably absented himself from the ceremony at the last moment—slipping out of the ranks in order, as he said, to bid a last farewell

to his two aged and widowed parents. He was discovered in a wine-shop and brought before a hastily summoned Court-martial. There his old military courage seems to have returned to him. He demonstrated by a reference to the instructions laid down in the Militiaman's Year-book that no mistake in saluting had been made, that his men had therefore been wrongfully convicted and illegally executed and that he, *a fortiori,* was innocent of any felonious intent. The Court, while approving his arguments, condemned him none the less to the indignity of a double decapitation for the offence of leaving his post without a signed permit from His Highness.

It was at this point that the Good Duke interposed on his behalf. He rescinded the decree; in other words, he relented. "Enough of bloodshed for one day," he was heard to remark, quite simply.

This speech was one of his happiest inspirations. Instantly it echoed from mouth to mouth; from end to end of his dominions. Enough of bloodshed for one day! That showed his true heart, the people declared. Enough of bloodshed! Their enthusiasm grew wilder when, in an access of princely graciousness, he repaired the lamentable excess of zeal by pinning the order of the Golden Vine to the offending officer's breast; it rose to a veritable frenzy as soon as they learned that, by Letters Patent, the entire defunct squadron had been posthumously ennobled. And this is only one of many occasions on which this ruler, by his intimate knowledge of human nature and the arts of government, was

enabled to wrest good from evil, and thereby consolidate his throne. . . .

It is passing strange, on the face of it, that this vivid personality, one of the most arresting figures in the history of the country, should be so briefly dealt with in the pages of Monsignor Perrelli. Doubly strange, and a serious disappointment to the reader, in view of the fact that the two men were contemporaries, and that the learned writer must have enjoyed exceptional facilities for obtaining first-hand knowledge of his subject. Almost inexplicable indeed, when one remembers those maxims which he himself, in the Introduction to his *Antiquities,* lays down for the writing of history; when one calls to mind his own gleams of exotic scholarship, those luminous asides and fruitful digressions, those statesmanlike comments on things in general which make his work not so much a compendium of local lore as a mirror of the polite learning of his age. It is no exaggeration to say that, compared with the ample treatment meted out to inconspicuous rulers like Alfonso the Seventeenth or Florizel the Fat, his account of the Good Duke Alfred is the baldest, the most perfunctory and conventional of chronicles. Neither good nor evil is related of him. There is nothing but a monotonous enumeration of events.

It was the bibliographer who, poring over the pages of the rival monk Father Capocchio, that audacious and salacious friar already mentioned—it was the bibliographer who hit upon a passage

which suggested a solution of the mystery and proved that, though Monsignor Perrelli lived during the reign of the Good Duke, it would be stretching unduly the sense of a plain word to say that he "flourished" under his rule. Other persons may have flourished; not so the kindly prelate.

"Nothing whatever," says this implacable enemy of Nepenthe, "is to be recorded to the credit of the sanguinary brigand—so he terms the Good Duke —nothing whatsoever: save and except only this, that he cut off the ears of a certain prattler, intriguer, and snuff-taking sensualist called Perrelli who, under the pretense of collecting data for an alleged historical treatise, profited by his priestly garb to play fast and loose with what little remained of decent family life on that God-abandoned island. Honour to whom honour is due! The ostensible reason for this unique act of justice was that the said Perrelli had appeared at some palace function with paste buckles on his shoes, instead of silver ones. The pretext was well chosen, inasmuch as the tyrant added to his other vices and absurdities the pose of being an extravagant stickler for etiquette. We happen to know, nevertheless, that the name of a young dancer, a prime favourite at Court, cropped up persistently at the time in connection with this malodorous but otherwise insignificant episode."

It were idle, at this hour of the day, to pursue the enquiry; the mutilation of Monsignor Perrelli's person, however, would explain better than any-

thing else his equivocal attitude as historian. Nor is the incident altogether inconsistent with what we know of the Duke's cheerful propensities. "Nose after ears!" was one of his blithest watchwords. Faced with so dispiriting a prospect and aware that His Highness was as good as his princely word, the sympathetic scholar, while too resentful to praise his achievements, may well have been too prudent to disparage them. Hence his reticence, his circumspection. Hence that monotonous enumeration of events.

This microscopic blot on the Duke's escutcheon, as well as other more commendable details of his life, were duly noted down by the zealous Mr. Eames who, in addition, had the good fortune to receive as a gift from his kindly but unassuming friend Count Caloveglia a quaint portrait of the prince, hitherto unknown—an engraving which he proposed to reproduce, together with other fresh iconographical material, in his enlarged and fully annotated edition of the *Antiquities*. The print depicts His Highness full face, seated on a throne in the accoutrements of Mars, with a gallant wig flowing in mazy ringlets from under the helmet upon his plated shoulders; overhead, upon a canopy of cloud, reclines a breezy assemblage of allegorical females—Truth, Mercy, Fame with her trumpet, and so forth. His nervous clean-shaven features do not wear the traditional smile; they are thoughtful, almost grim. On his left is portrayed a huge *cannon* astride of which can be seen a chubby

angel; the Duke's hand reposes, in a paternal caress, on the cherub's head—symbolical doubtless of his love of children. His right elbow rests upon a table, and the slender bejewelled fingers are listlessly pressing open a lettered scroll of parchment on which can be deciphered the words "A chi t'ha figliato" (to her who bare thee)—a legend which the bibliographer, whose acquaintance with the vernacular was not on a level with his classical attainments, conjectured to be some fashionable courtly toast of the period.

The mention of artillery recalls the fact that His Highness was an amateur of ordnance. He established a gun-foundry on the island, and what he did not know about the art of casting pieces, as practised in his day, was plainly not worth knowing. Had it not been for his passionate love of testing new processes and new combinations of metal, he might have attained to a European reputation in that department. But he was always experimenting, and the consequence was that his cannons were always splitting. One, however, a monster of its kind, remained intact, to outward appearances. It was fired on every conceivable occasion—to summon the Militia, for example, from remote corners of the island at any hour of the day or night, a considerable hardship to those who lived at a distance of two or three miles, seeing that according to the instructions set forth in the Militiaman's Yearbook, the sternest penalties were imposed upon all who failed to appear in their ranks at the Palace

gates within five minutes after the signal had been sounded.

It was a perilous gun to handle. Owing to some undiscoverable flaw of construction or imperfection in the alloy, the monster soon developed a disconcerting knack of back-firing, hazardous to life and limb. It stands to reason that the Good Duke attached no undue importance to any trifling disaster accruing therefrom. On the contrary, in order to be sure of a thunderous detonation he often deigned to superintend in person the loading of this particular piece.

"More powder," he would then command. "More powder! Ram it in! Never mind her little caprices! A good salute is worth a good soldier! More powder! Fill her up to the brim! She's only playful, like her master." Those who lost fingers or hands or arms received the Order of the Golden Vine. Whenever a major portion of the anatomy, a head or so forth, went astray, the victim was posthumously ennobled.

Since his day, thanks to the science of a Paduan engineer, this defect has been almost completely overcome, and the gun can still be heard on great occasions, such as the Duke's birthday, the Festival of the Patron Saint, or the visit to the island of some foreign sovereign; it is also discharged, as of yore, to summon the Militia for the purpose of quelling any popular disturbance. But even now it occasionally relapses into its old humours—with this difference, that instead of being decorated with

a coveted distinction, the disabled man is sent to the hospital and told not to make a fool of himself next time.

This was the gun whose sound attracted the strained attention of Mr. Keith and his companions, far away, on the sea, under the cliffs.

Chapter XXIV

The firing had ceased; the boat began to glide forwards once more. But Mr. Heard's eye remained fixed upon the ill-omened black rock. The sun's rays had already licked dry the moisture on its surface; it shone with a steady dull glow. Some malefic force seemed to dwell here. Some demon haunted the place, peering out of its crevices or rising up from the turquoise-tinted water at its foot. The suicides' rock!

That vague sense of apprehension, of impending disaster, once more invaded him. Suddenly it revealed itself in definite terms. A ghastly notion flitted through his mind.

"You think it possible that Denis——?" he began.

His friend seemed to have lost all interest in that subject. It was a way he had.

"Denis? I really could not tell. I'm not sufficiently in his confidence. . . . Honour thy father and

thy mother," he proceeded, reverting to his former theme. "What think you, Heard, of this old injunction? Is it not altogether obsolete? Was it not written for quite other conditions? Honour thy father and mother. Why? The State educates children, feeds them, investigates and cures their complaints, washes and weighs them, reports on their teeth and stomachs, prescribes when they may begin to smoke and enter public-houses: where does parental authority come in? The State provides old folks with refuges and pensions: how about the former obligations of children? Child and parent alike now thank the community for what they once received from each other. And the geographical elements that went to the making of a home are also dispersed. Rich and poor roam like gipsies from one country to another, from one flat into the next; the patriarchal board is replaced by clubs and grill-rooms and fried-fish shops. Many a man who thinks to found a home discovers that he has merely opened a tavern for his friends. Note, too, that the family has outgrown its ecclesiastical sanction; the oil of supernaturalism which once greased the wheels has run dry; the machinery is creaking. Industrial conditions have killed the old home. Requiescat! Honour thy father and mother. Industrialism has killed that commandment. Thou shalt not steal. Consider this injunction, Heard, and ask yourself whether industrialism does not split its sides with laughing at it. If we are to galvanize that old collection of laws into some semblance

of life, every one of them must be rewritten and brought up to date. They are inappropriate for modern life; their interest is purely historical. We want new values. We are no longer nomads. Industrialism has killed the pastoral and the agricultural points of view. And how the modern Jews smile at our infatuation for those queer doctrines and legends which they themselves have long ago outgrown. Apropos, what has become of Marten?"

"Left the island, I hear."

"Quick work. Now I wonder why?"

Everybody wondered at Marten's precipitate departure. Even Angelina wondered.

She just wondered.

Had he known that she wondered, and just wondered, he might have been tempted to prolong his stay. But Marten was too young to be a practical psychologist. He had lived for half a day in terror of what he called "the inevitable reaction," unaware of the fact that certain people do not suffer from reactions, and too engrossed in mineralogy to have learnt, from a study of other sciences, that Angelina was one of them. She had passed that stage, with Homeric laughter, long before his appearance on Nepenthe. She just wondered, nowadays.

Scared, as though the avenging Furies were at his heels, he quitted the scene of his nocturnal romance, leaving half his geological projects incomplete. Had he taken the amiable Don Francesco into his confidence he might have heard something

to his advantage. But the scientist could not endure the sight of a Christian priest. Like other intolerant folk he was now paying for his prejudices.

"An erotic little beast," Keith went on. "And a typical Hebrew—a scoffer. Have you noticed what a disruptive and irreverential brood they are? They move up and down society like some provocative fluid, insensible to our ideals; they take a diabolical pleasure in shattering our old-established conceptions of right and wrong. I confess I like them for that; they need shattering, some of those conceptions. And they have their weakness too, their Achilles heel—music, for instance, or chess. When next you are in town don't forget to go to that little chess club of theirs over Aldgate East station. It is better than a play to watch their faces. And with all this materialism they have a mysterious feminine leaven of enthusiasm and unworldliness. What pecuniary advantage could Marten expect to gain from his minerals?"

"A professorship."

"Why, possibly. He had the professional temperament; there was not much poetry in his composition. If you were to ask him, 'What are those wonderful rocks over there, shaped like some titanic organ and glowing with a kind of violet flame?' he would say, 'Organ be blowed. It's columnar lithoidite.' I learnt a little from him, but not enough. I wish we had him here. He could have told us something."

And Mr. Keith, ever avid of fresh things, re-

gretted his lost opportunities. He was in one of his acquisitive, Corsair moods. He said:

"I could take geology by the throat just now. It's disgusting, not to know things!"

His companion, meanwhile, beheld the panorama in all its nightmarish splendour, as it drifted past him. He saw the bluffs of feathery pumice, the lava precipices—frozen cataracts of white, black, blood red, pale grey and sombre brown, smeared over with a vitreous enamel of obsidian or pierced by oily, writhing dykes that blazed with metallic scintillations. Anon came some yawning cleft or an assemblage of dizzy rock-needles, fused into whimsical tints and attitudes, spiky, distorted, overtoppling; then a bold tufa rampart, immaculate in its beauty, stainless as a curtain of silk. And as the boat moved on, he looked into horrid dells which the rains had torn out of the loose scoriæ. Gaping wounds, they wore the bright hues of corruption. Their flanks were blotched with a livid nitrous efflorescence, with flaring sulphur, unhealthy verdure of pitchstone, streaks of arsenical vermilion; their beds—a frantic maze of boulders.

He beheld this crazy stratification, this chaos of incandescent nature, set in a frame of deep blue sky and sea. It lay there calmly, like some phantasmagoric flower, some monstrous rose that swoons away, with upturned face, in a solar caress.

He saw it with the eye. His mind was elsewhere. He was trying, in honest and relentless fashion, to discover himself. What if his human values were

really wrong!

Thomas, the doubting apostle. . . .

Africa had made him think; had made him more silent and reflective than ever. And now this sudden strange stimulus of Nepenthe—it was driving his thoughts headlong, out of their old grooves.

Here was Keith, a man of altogether different stamp, drawing conclusions which he dared not formulate for himself. How far were they applicable, those old Hebrew precepts, to modern conditions? Were they still availing as guides to conduct?

"You are a candid person, Keith, and I think I am. I sincerely try to be. Will you tell me what you think? You seem to have a quarrel with Moses and his commandments, which we are taught to regard as the keystone of ethics. I don't want to discuss things. I want to listen to the opinions of a man so different from myself as you are. It may do me good. And I think I could stand almost anything," he added, with a laugh, "in this landscape —in this clear pagan light, as you call it."

"I used to be interested in such things as a boy. I suppose all respectable boys are; and I was respectable even at that tender age. Nowadays, though I still pick up an Oriental rug now and then, I have no further use for Oriental gods."

"What is your objection to them?"

Mr. Keith paused before replying. Then he said:

"The drawback of Oriental gods is that they have been manufactured by the proletariat for the

use of the aristocracy. They act accordingly; that is, they distil the morality of their creators which I consider a noxious emanation. The classic gods were different. They were invented by intellectualists who felt themselves capable of maintaining a kind of comradeship with their deities. Men and gods were practically on a level. They walked hand in hand over the earth. These gods belonged to what one might call the horizontal or downstairs variety."

"And those others?"

"Oh, they are the upstairs or vertical type. They live overhead. Why overhead? Because they have been created by the proletariat. The proletariat loves to humiliate itself. Therefore they manufacture a god who approves of grovelling, a god who can look down upon them. They exalt this deity to an infinite degree in point of goodness and distance, and in so doing they inevitably abase themselves. Now I disapprove of grovelling. That means I disapprove of upstairs gods."

"Upstairs gods——"

"If you walk into my front door as a distinguished visitor I am happy to show you the place. You can prowl about the garden, poke your nose into the pantry and learn, if it amuses you, all about my private life. But if you rent a high attic overlooking my premises and stare out of your window all day long, watching my movements and noting down everything I do, why, damn it, I call that vulgar. Staring is bad form. Vertical gods are in-

quisitive. I don't like to be supervised. I don't care about this *dossier* business. My garden is for you and me to walk about in, not for outsiders to stare into. Which reminds me that you have not been to see me lately. You ought to come and look at my cannas; you really ought! They are in magnificent bloom just now. When shall it be?"

Mr. Keith seemed to be already tired of the subject. In fact he was as near being bored as ever he allowed himself to be. But the other refused to let the conversation be side-tracked. He wanted to know.

"Vertical and horizontal gods. . . . Dear me. Sounds rather profane."

"I have not heard that word for quite a long time."

"You don't feel the need of any kind of superior being to control human affairs?"

"Not up to the present. I can find no room in my Cosmos for a deity, save as a waste product of human weakness, an excrement of the imagination. If you gave me the sauciest god that ever sat on a cloud or breakfasted with the Village Idiot—'pon my word, I shouldn't know what to do with him. I don't collect bric-à-brac myself, and the British Museum is dreadfully overstocked. Perhaps the Duchess could make some use of him, if he specialized in lace vestments and choral mass. By the way, I hear that she is going to be admitted into the Roman Church next week; there is to be a luncheon after the ceremony. Are you going?"

"Vertical and horizontal gods. . . . I never heard that distinction made before."

"It is a difference, my dear Heard. Mankind remains in direct contact with the downstairs variety. That simplifies matters. But the peculiar position of those others—perpendicularly overhead at a vast distance—necessitates a troublesome code of verbal signals, unintelligible to common folk, for the expression of mutual desires. You cannot have any god of this kind without some such cumbrous contrivance to bridge over the gulf and make communication possible. It is called theology. It complicates life very considerably. Yes," he pursued, "the vertical-god system is not only vulgar; it is perplexing and expensive. Think of the wastage, of the myriads of people who have been sacrificed because they misinterpreted some enigmatical word in the code. Why are you intent on these conundrums?"

"Well, partly at least, it's quite a practical matter. You know that American millionaire, van Koppen, and the scandal attached to his peculiar habits? It made me wonder, only yesterday——"

But at this juncture the tiresome old boatman lifted up his voice once more.

"See that high cliff, gentlemens? Funny thing happen there, very funny. Dam-fool foreigner here, he collect flowers. Always collecting flowers on bad rocks; sometimes with rope round him, for fear of falling; with rope, ha, ha, ha! Nasty man. And poor. No money at all. He always say, 'All

Italians liars, and liars where go? To Hell, sure. That's where liars go. That's where Italians go.' Now rich man he say liar to poor man. But poor man, he better not say liar to rich man. That so, gentlemens. One day he say liar to nice old Italian. Nice old man think: 'Ah, you wait, putrid puppy of bastard pig, you wait.' Nice old man got plenty good lot vineyards back of cliff there. One day he walk to see grapes. Then he look to end of cliff and see rope hanging. Very funny, he think. Then he look to end of rope and see nasty-man hanging. That so, gentlemens. Nasty-man hanging in air. Can't get up. 'Pull me up,' says he. Nice old man, he laugh—ha, ha, ha! laugh till his belly hurt. Then he pull out knife and begin to cut rope. 'See knife?' he shout down. 'How much to pull up?' Five hundred dollar! 'How much?' Five thousand! 'How much?' Fifty thousand! Nice old man say quite quiet: 'You no got fifty thousand in the world, you liar. Liars where go? To Hell, sure. That's where liars go. That's where you go, Mister. To Hell.' And he cut rope. Down he go, patatrac! round and round in air, like firework wheel, on to first rock—paff! second rock—paff! third rock—paff! fifty rock—pa-pa-pa-paff! Six hundred feets. After that he arrive, all messy, in water. That so, gentlemens. Gone where to? Swim to Philadelphia? I don't think! Him drowned, sure. Ha, ha, ha! Nice old man, when he come home that morning, he laugh. He laugh. He just laugh. He laugh first quiet, then loud. He laugh all the time, and soon

family laugh too. He laugh for ten days, till he nearly die. Got well again, and live plenty good years after. In Paradise to-day, God rest his soul! And never found out, no never. Fine judge on Nepenthe. Always fine judge here. He know everything, and he know nothing. Understand? All nice peoples here. That so, gentlemens."

He told the tale with Satanic gusto, rocking himself to and fro as though convulsed with some secret joy. Then, after expectorating violently, he resumed the oars which had been dropped in the heat of gesticulation.

The bishop was pensive. There was something wrong with this story—something fundamentally wrong. He turned to Keith:

"That man must be a liar too. If, as he says, the thing was never found out, how can he have learnt all about it?"

"Hush, my dear fellow. He thinks I don't know, but I do. It was his own father to whom the adventure occurred."

Chapter XXV

"The adventure!" said Mr. Heard.

"The adventure. Surely you are not going to make a tragedy of it? If you cannot see the joke of that story, you must be hard to please. I nearly died of laughing when I first heard it."

"What would you have done?"

"If I had been the botanist? I would not have made myself disagreeable to the natives. Also, I would not have got myself into a tangle with that rope."

"You think he ought to have cut it?"

"What else could the poor fellow do? It strikes me, Heard, you attach inordinate importance to human life."

"It's all rather complex," sighed the bishop.

"Now that is really interesting!"

"Interesting?"

"Why should you find it complex, when I find it simple? Let me see. Our lives are perfectly in-

significant, aren't they? We know it for a fact. But we don't like it. We don't like being of no account. We want something to make us feel more valuable than we are. Consequently we invent a fiction to explain away that insignificance—the fiction of a personality overhead everlastingly occupied in watching every single one of us, and keenly engrossed in our welfare. If this were the case, we would cease to be insignificant, and we might try to oblige him by not killing each other. It happens to be a fiction. Get rid of the fiction, and your feeling of complexity evaporates. I perceive you are in an introspective mood. Worrying about some pastoral epistle?"

"Worrying about my values, as you would say. Up to the present, Keith, I don't seem to have had time to think; I had to act; there was always something urgent to be taken in hand. Now that I am really lazy for the first time, and in this stimulating environment, certain problems of life keep cropping up. Minor problems, of course; for it is a consolation to know that the foundations of good conduct are immutable. Our sense of right and wrong is firmly implanted in us. The laws of morality, difficult as they often are to understand, have been written down for our guidance in letters that never change."

"Never change? You might as well say, my dear Heard, that these cliffs never change. The proof that the laws of good conduct change is this, that if you were upright after the fashion of your great-

grandfather you would soon find yourself in the clutches of the law for branding a slave, or putting a bullet through someone in a duel. I grant that morality changes slowly. It changes slowly because the proletariat, whose product it is, does the same. There is not much difference, I imagine, between the crowds of old Babylon and new Shoreditch; hence their peculiar emanations resemble each other more or less. That is why morality compares so unfavourably with intellectuality, which is the product of the upper sections of society and flashes out new lights every moment. But even morality changes. The Spartans, a highly moral people, thought it positively indecent not to steal. A modern vice, such as mendacity, was accounted a virtue by the greatest nation of antiquity. A modern virtue, like that of forgiving one's enemies, was accounted a vice proper to slaves. Drunkenness, reprobated by ancients and moderns alike, became the mark of a gentleman in intermediate periods."

"I see what you are driving at. You wish me to think that this fictitious value, as you would call it—this halo of sanctity—with which we now invest a human life, may be blown away at any moment. Possibly you are right. Perhaps we English do exaggerate its importance. They don't take much account of life in my part of Africa."

"And then, I disagree with what you say about the difficulty of understanding the laws of morality. Any child can grasp the morality of its period. Why should I pretend to be interested in what a

child can grasp? It is a positive strain to keep one's mind at that low level. Why should I impose this strain upon myself? When a grown-up man shows an unfeigned interest in such questions I regard him as a case of arrested development. All morality is a generalization, and all generalizations are tedious. Altogether the question that confronts me is not whether morality is worth talking about, but whether it's worth laughing at. Sometimes I think it is. It reminds me of those old pantomime jokes that make one quite sad, at first, with their heart-breaking vulgarity; those jokes, you know, that have to be well rubbed in before we begin to see how really funny they are. And, by Jove, they do rub this one in, don't they? You must talk to Don Francesco about these things. You will find him sound, though he does not push his conclusions as far as I do—not in public, at least. Or to Count Caloveglia. He is a remarkable Latin, that old man. Why don't you drive up one day and have a look at his Locri Faun? Street, the South Kensington man, thinks very highly of it."

"I would like to listen to you just now. I am listening, and thinking. Please go on. I'll preach you my sermon some other day."

"Will you? I wonder! I don't believe, Heard, that you will preach another sermon in your life. I don't think you will ever go back to Africa, or to any other episcopal work. I think you have reached a turning point."

The bishop was thoughtful for a moment. Those

words went home. Then he said lightly:

"You are in better vein than you were a short while ago."

"That story of the botanist has revived me. He tells it rather well, doesn't he? It is good to inhabit a world where such things can still happen. I feel as if life were worth living. I feel as if I could discuss anything. What were you going to say about the American millionaire?"

"Ah yes," replied Mr. Heard. "I wondered, supposing these reports about the ladies are true, how far you and I, for example, should condone his vices."

"Vices. My dear bishop! Under a sky like this. Have a good look at it; do."

Mr. Heard, barely conscious of what he was doing, obeyed the counsel. Raising his hand, he pushed the silken awning to one side. Then he peered skyward into the noonday zenith; into an ocean of blue, immeasurable. There was no end to this azure liquid. Gazing thus, his intelligence became aware of the fact that there are skies of different kinds. This one was not quite like his native firmament. Here was no suggestion of a level space overhead, remote, but still conceivable —a space whereon some god might have sat enthroned, notebook in hand, jotting down men's virtues, and vices, and what not. A sky of this kind was obviously not built to accommodate deities in a sitting posture.

Instead of commenting on this simple observation he remarked:

"I mean, whether one should publicly approve of van Koppen's ladies, supposing they exist."

"Why should I approve or disapprove? Old Koppen's activities do not impinge on mine. Like a sensible fellow he cultivates a hobby. He indulges himself. Why interfere? Tell me, why should I disapprove of things?"

"Look here, Keith! Not long ago you were disapproving of vertical gods."

"That is different. They do impinge on my activities."

"Are the peculiar hobbies of their votaries distasteful to you?"

"Not at all. Their hobbies do not clash with mine. To feel righteous, or to feel sinful, is quite an innocent form of self-indulgence——"

"Innocent self-indulgence? Dear me! You seem to be taking morality by the throat for a change. Is that your conception of sin? How should Moses have come to inscribe some particular form of wrong-doing into his Code, if it had not proved harmful to the community at large?"

His friend paused before replying. He took out another cigar, bit off its end, and lighted it. Then he sent a few fragrant whiffs over the sea. At last he said:

"Moses! I have a clear portrait of Moses in my mind; a clear and favourable portrait. I imagine him gentle, wise, and tolerant. Picture to yourself such a man. He is drawing up a preliminary list of the more noteworthy forms of misconduct, with

a view to submitting it for Divine approval, to be welded later into the so-called Ten Commandments. He is still puzzling, you perceive, which sins ought to be included and which left out. Now that particular offence of which our millionaire is accused happens to have been left out of consideration so far."

"Why has it been left out?" enquired the bishop.

"Nomadic habits. And besides—Moses, don't forget, is a kindly old fellow, who likes people to have as much harmless amusement as possible; he is not always sniffing about to discover evil. But Aaron, or some other old family friend of his, thinks differently. He is a person such as we all know—a sour-faced puritan who has lost the vigour which people, rightly or wrongly, attribute to van Koppen. This man forgets what he used to do in his own youthful days; he comes up to Moses, professing to be horrified at this particular offence. 'These young people,' he says, 'the way they go on! It's a sin, that's what it is. And you, Moses, I'm ashamed of you. This sort of thing ought to be stopped. It ought to be publicly reprimanded in those blessed Tables of yours.' 'A sin?' says gentle Moses. 'You surprise me, Aaron. I confess it never struck me in that light before. But I think I see your point. We have a conference to-night on the Holy Mountain; I may be able to get a clause inserted——' 'Do, there's a good fellow,' says the other. 'But aren't you a little hard on the youngsters?' asks Moses. 'You wouldn't believe it,

but I was a boy myself once and I should have got into a lot of rows if such an enactment had been in existence then. Moreover (and here his eyes assume a rapt, prophetic look) I seem to see, rising out of the distant future, a personage of royal line, beloved of God—one David who, if your proposal were to come into force, would be classed as a pretty hot sinner.' 'Oh, bother David! Look here, I'm not asking for a loan of money, old man. Just see to it that my New Sin is inscribed on the Tables. Hang it all! What's that, to a man of your influence up there? You can't think how it annoys me nowadays to see all these young people—all these young people—need I go into particulars?' 'You needn't. I'm not altogether a fool,' says gentle Moses. 'And I'll see what I can do to oblige you, if only for the sake of your dear mother.' "

The bishop, at the end of this narration, could not help smiling.

"That," continued Keith, "is how Moses gets talked over by the Pharisees. That is how sins are manufactured and classified. And from that preposterous old Hebrew system of right and wrong they jump straight into our English penal code. And there they sit tight," he added.

"Is that your quarrel with what you call the upstairs god system?"

"Precisely! It does not affect me by its unsanitary tendency to multiply sins. It affects me when it impinges on my own activities; that is to say, when it transforms those sins into legal crimes.

How would you like to be haled before a Court of law for some ridiculous trifle, which became a crime only because it used to be a sin, and became a sin only because some dyspeptic or impotent old antediluvian was envious of his neighbour's pleasure? Our statute-book reeks of discredited theories of conduct; the serpent's trail of the theologian, of the reactionary, is over all."

"It never struck me in that light before," said Mr. Heard.

"No? Our reverence for inspired idiots: has it never struck you? Don't you realize that we are still in the stage of that *enfant terrible* of Christianity, Paul of Tarsus, and his gift of tongues? In the stage of these Russians here, with their decayed Messiah? What do you think of them?"

"I must say they look pretty, all bathing together. Rather improper. But decidedly apostolic. You know I am not easily shocked in such matters. When you have lived in Africa among the M'tezo! Lovely fellows. I assure you they could give points to anyone on this island. And your friends the Bulanga! To think that I once baptized three hundred of them in one day. And the very next week they ate up old Mrs. Richardson, our best lady preacher. The poor dear! We buried her riding boots, I remember. There was nothing else to bury. . . . It's getting warm, isn't it? Makes one feel sleepy."

"Sleepy? I don't agree with you at all. That Russian sect, Heard, had between two and three

million followers out there. But I fancy our little contingent will not be on this island much longer. The judge tells me that he means to make short work of them when he gets a chance. If the militia have really been called out, I should not be surprised to learn that the Messiah has been up to some new tomfoolery."

"Really? H'm. The Militia. . . . I find it very warm all of a sudden."

Mr. Heard had listened enough for the time being. Now he leaned back and rested.

But Keith was wide awake.

"You are a disappointing person, Heard. First you inveigle me into a religious discussion and then, when I begin to wake up, you go to sleep."

"I didn't want to argue, my dear fellow. It's too hot to argue. I wanted to hear your opinion."

"My opinion? Listen, Heard. All mankind is at the mercy of a handful of neurotics. Neurotics and their catchwords. Catchwords like duty, charity, purity, sobriety. Sobriety! In order that Miss Wilberforce may not come home drunk—listen, Heard!—all we other lunatics forgo the pleasure of a pint of beer after ten o'clock. How we love tormenting ourselves! Listen, Heard. I'll tell you what it is. We are ripe for a new Messiah, like these Russians. We are not Europeans. We are Indian fakirs, self-torturers. We are a pack of masochists. That is what upstairs gods have done for us. Listen, Heard!"

The bishop failed to catch the import of this per-

oration. Its sound alone reached him like an echo from far away. He was unaccountably drowsy.

"Fakirs. I quite understand——"

The boat seemed to move more slowly than before. Perhaps the oarsmen were weary, or suffering from the heat. The glare pierced the awning. Mr. Heard, as he reclined about his cushions, felt the perspiration gathering on his forehead. A spell had fallen upon him—the spell of a southern noon. It lulled his senses. It laid chains upon his thoughts.

There was a long silence, broken only by the splash of the oars and by a steady flow of conversation on the part of the two Greek genii, who seemed impervious to the midday beams and entirely absorbed in one another. In decorous undertones they chattered and laughed. Mr. Heard opened his drooping eyelids from time to time to take pleasure in their merry play of feature, wondering dreamily what could be the subject-matter of this endless polite conversation.

Chapter XXVI

Both the old boatman and Mr. Keith were correct in their surmises. There was trouble in the market-place, serious trouble; so serious that for the first time in five years—ever since that deplorable scandal of the Irish lady and the poodle—the militia were being called out. And it was entirely the fault of the Sacred Sixty-three.

The Messiah, personally, was not to blame. That poor old man had much declined of late; he was enfeebled in health and spirits. A French artist who was specially despatched from Paris to do an original sketch of him for the enterprising journal *L'Illustration* had, at the end of several sittings, uncharitably declared him to be "complètement ga-ga." The voluptuous surroundings of Nepenthe, the abundant food, adoration of disciples, alcoholic and carnal debaucheries, had impaired his tough Moujik frame and blunted his wit, working havoc with that energy and peasant craftiness which

once ruled an Emperor's Court. His body was obese. His mind was in a state of advanced putrefaction. Even his personal cleanliness left something to be desired. Sitting there, puffy and pasty, in a darkened room, he looked more than ever like some obscene vegetable that has grown up in the shade.

He moved seldom and with difficulty; he hardly ever opened his mouth save to eat—for his appetite, thanks to certain daily exertions on the part of the communal doctor, was still fairly satisfactory. When he spoke at all it was in scattered monosyllables which even the most devoted of his disciples were unable to arrange into such coherence as to justify their inclusion in the *Golden Book*. All this, though hidden from the world at large, had been observed with dismay by the initiated. It was an open secret among them that the last twenty-one sayings ascribed to him in that volume had never issued from his lips at all. They had been concocted by a clique of young extremists, who were now masters of the situation. These fanatics edited the *Golden Book* and held the old man completely in subjection, ousting his former and more moderate collaborators.

An ill-considered action on the part of this group led to the disaster and eclipsed the light of holiness on Nepenthe by bringing the apostles into conflict with the secular arm of the law. Fretting at the Master's prolonged inactivity and eager, after the fashion of disciples, to improve on his maxims, they

decided upon a bold step. They decided that the time was ripe for a new Revelation.

The Messiah's last authentic one, it will be remembered, ran to the effect that "flesh and blood of warm-blooded beasts is Abomination to Little White Cows." He had been inspired to insert the word *warm-blooded* because fish, for example, was an article of diet of which he was inordinately fond, and he could not bring himself to deprive the faithful of this gift of God.

With misplaced zeal, and little thinking that it would cost many of them their lives and liberties, these enthusiasts gave it out that the new Revelation ran as follows: "everything derivable from dead beasts is Abomination to Little White Cows." They had been inspired to insert the word *dead* because sheep's wool, for example, was an article of clothing in which they greatly delighted, and they could not bring themselves to deprive the faithful of this gift of God.

Even as it stood, the Commandment entailed severe sacrifices on the part of the Sacred Sixty-three. No boot-leather, no picturesque belts, no bone knife-handles or combs, no tallow candles. . . . They were prepared, none the less, to carry out to the letter this injunction, since it gave them what all religious people require—something to torment themselves with; and this is how matters stood when, on that morning, a stalwart batch of newcomers from the wilds of Muscovy, burning with the ardour of abnegation and wholly ignorant of

local laws and customs, sauntered across the market-place in freshly purchased hempen sandals.

Tobacco being derivable neither from warm-blooded beasts nor yet from dead ones, a member of the band bethought himself of the fact that he had run out of cigarettes. Knowing not a word of Italian he entered the shop of a tobacconist and imitated the gesture of smoking with such success that the proprietor straightway understood and supplied him with a packet. Then he remembered that he also needed matches. This called for a gesture rather more complex; so complex, indeed, that perhaps nobody but a Nepenthean—gifted, as all his nation is, with alert intuition—could have divined the apostle's want. The tobacconist was equal to the occasion. With a friendly smile of comprehension he laid on the counter a diminutive box of wax vestas, price two sous.

There the matter might have rested but for the new Revelation, which prompted the sturdy stranger to investigate the composition of the article tendered. He took out one match and examined it carefully. Then, triturating its substance between his fingers, he applied his nose to the product and sniffed critically. The outcome was suspicious in the highest degree. There was no perceptible odour of beeswax; the object had been compounded, only too plainly, of the fat of dead animals; it was the Abomination, the Unclean Thing. Devout, and gifted with the hot impulse of youth, he acted precisely as he would have acted in Russia under a

similar provocation. With a third gesture, one of abhorrence and ungovernable fury, he threw the box into the tobacconist's face.

And there the matter, once more, might have rested, had the salesman been a Russian. Russians understand frank dealing.

He happened to be a native.

Fully to appreciate what followed, it is necessary to bear in mind that local tobacconists are in a somewhat anomalous position. They occupy a social status superior to those of many other countries. They are not private merchants or ordinary citizens; they are, in a manner, servants of the State. A native tobacconist is empowered to dispense *carta bollata,* which is the official stamped paper used for contracts and other legal documents requiring registration; he deals in tobacco and postage stamps —government monopolies; he sells, by special licence, wax vestas, on each box of which there is a duty so minute as not to be felt by the individual purchaser and yet, in its cumulative effect, so great as to enable the State to pay, out of this source of revenue alone, for the upkeep of all its colonial judges at a monthly salary of forty-five francs apiece. It is a reasonable tax. Don Francesco, who had notions of political economy and knew something of English life, having preached to thousands of Catholic miners in Wales and confessed hundreds of Catholic ladies in Mayfair—an occupation in which he might still be engaged, but for a little *contretemps* which brought him into collision with

the Jesuits of Mount Street—Don Francesco, who could voice the southerner's onesided point of view, often adverted to this match-tax when proving the superiority of his country's administrative methods over those of England. This is what he would say to his intimate friends:

"The Russian has convictions but no principles. The Englishman has principles but no convictions —cast-iron principles, which save him the trouble of thinking out anything for himself. This is as much as anyone can ever hope to grasp concerning this lymphatic, unimaginative race. They obey the laws—a criminal requires imagination. They never start a respectable revolution—you cannot revolt without imagination. Among other things they pride themselves on their immunity from vexatious imposts. Yet whisky, the best quality of which is worth tenpence a bottle, is taxed till it costs five shillings; ale, the life-blood of the people, would be dear at threepence a gallon and yet costs fivepence a pint; tobacco, which could profitably be sold at twopence a pound, goes for fivepence an ounce. They will submit to any number of these extortions, being persuaded, in the depths of their turbid intelligence, that such things are devised for the good of the nation at large. That is the Englishman's method of procuring happiness: to deny himself pleasure in order to save his neighbour's soul. Ale and tobacco are commodities out of which a man can extract pleasure. They are therefore appropriate objects for harassing restrictions. But

nobody can extract pleasure out of lucifer matches. They are therefore pre-eminently unfitted for exploitation as a source of governmental revenue. So keen is their sense of pleasure and non-pleasure, and such is their *furor phlegmaticus* on this particular question, that when it is proposed to establish a tax on matches—an imperceptible duty which would enrich the Exchequer to a vast extent—they will form a procession ten miles long to protest against the outrage, and threaten to batter down the Houses of Parliament. Why? Because there is no ethical purpose to be served by taxing matches, seeing that only a madman would give himself the guilty pleasure of either drinking or smoking them. In short, these English reason after the fashion of paranoiacs—logically, but from a wrong premise. Not that I dislike their women. . . ."

The action of the quick-tempered apostle can now be appraised in its full enormity. A local tobacconist is a person in authority, a State official, and the nation safeguards the interests and the fair name of those who serve it faithfully. When it is remembered that according to §43 of the 16th Section of their Penal Code any person speaking disrespectfully to, or of, a Government official renders himself liable to a term of cellular confinement not exceeding thirty-one years, ten lunar months and eighteen days, it may be imagined what penalties are applicable to the crime of actual personal violence towards such a sacrosanct individual--a crime of which the Russian was unquestionably guilty.

Now this particular tobacconist, though tremulously sensitive, like all southerners, on a point of honour, was as good-natured and forgiving as might be consistent with his rank of Government official. He passed for a respectable married man with an eligible daughter and a taste for the quiet life; he did not want trouble. The purchase of an additional packet of cigarettes, accompanied or unaccompanied by a frank apology, would have more than satisfied his sense of honour.

There the matter might have rested. The second packet might have been bought and even the apology tendered, but for the ill-considered action of a young farmer who entered the shop at that moment to procure a couple of postcards. This worthy lad was one of several dozen aspirants to the hand of the tobacconist's daughter, whose dowry was reputed to be considerable. He witnessed the insult and, desirous of standing well in the graces of a prospective father-in-law, dealt the offending alien so masterly a punch in the region of the solar plexus that he not only doubled up, but forgot to straighten himself out again. Two or three lusty apostles came to the rescue without delay. They threw the youth down, stamped on his face, pounded his abdomen, pulled his hair out in handfuls, and otherwise treated him exactly as if the thing were happening in Russia. This spectacle was too much for the tobacconist's sense of honour. With unwonted sprightliness he vaulted over the writhing cluster and summoned a municipal policeman. The

officer was on the spot in a twinkling, sword in hand. And there, in all conscience, the matter ought to have rested—with the identification and bestowal in custody of the turbulent parties.

But frenzy hung in the air; a red cloud of insanity was hovering over Nepenthe. Although the volcano continued to behave in exemplary fashion, although the clergy had done their utmost to allay popular apprehensions, the native mind had not calmed down since the news concerning the Saint Elias fountain and those other portents had been disseminated. The inhabitants were in a state of suppressed alarm and ready, at the least provocation, to burst out into some fiendish act of folly. And the Russians, especially those latest arrivals, could not withdraw themselves from the subtle influence of the south wind, the frank stimulation of a cloudless sky; it made them feel, after their gloomy forests and lowering horizons, like wild beasts that rush from darkened cages into some sunny arena. Everyone lost his wits. The appearance of a constable, far from restoring order, was the signal for an uproarious tumult; the *fracas,* as the French artist was heard to declare, promptly developed into a *mêlée.* Nobody troubled about the merits of the case further than that it was a question of Apostles *versus* Gentiles.

The former were in sad minority. But they constituted a serried rank of muscular Christians; they laid about them like those old monks of Alexandria. All Russians are born fighters—if not on the battle-

field, then at least in the lanes and taverns of their natal villages. The Little White Cows, wholly ignorant of the difference between their own law and that of Italy on questions of assault and battery, used their fists with such success that thirty natives were stretched out in almost as few seconds. Their Faith was at stake; moreover, and as a matter of fact, they were enjoying themselves hugely. The occasion reminded them of a Sunday at home.

Then numbers began to tell—numbers and knives. For your sun-scorched Nepenthean, when duly roused, confesses to an expert knowledge of anatomy; he can tell you, to the fraction of an inch, where the liver, the spleen, kidneys and various other coy organs of the human frame are located. Blood, the blood of the Sacred Sixty-three, began to flow. At that sight the women, as their manner is, set up a scream.

The Palace of Justice abutted on the market-place, and up to that moment His Worship Signor Malipizzo might have been lost to the world, so deeply immersed was he in threading the labyrinthine mazes of an exceptionally intricate affiliation case—a warm document, after his own heart. The sound of the scream suspended his labours. Like a gouty parrot he hopped down from his seat of judgment, spat on the floor, limped to the window and took in the situation at a glance. That is to say, he understood the cause of the disturbance as little as did any one else; it would have required a divine inspiration to guess that a box of wax vestas

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was at the bottom of the affair; but he knew enough, quite enough, more than enough, for the purpose in hand. He knew, to begin with, that apostles were involved in the brawl. He knew, what was equally important, the provisions of the Penal Code. It sufficed. His chance for dealing with the Russian colony had at last arrived. Allowing himself barely time to smack his lips at this providential interlude he gave orders for the great cannon of Duke Alfred to be sounded. It boomed once or twice over Nepenthe and reverberated among the rocks.

In times of yore a certain interval was wont to elapse before the militia could be assembled, living as they did in distant regions of the island. But nowadays, as befitted a laborious rural population, they were spending their morning in the wine-shops of the town, gambling, drinking, or playing skittles. This enabled a sufficient number of them to forgather, in an incredibly short space of time, at the outskirts of the market-place (occupied by a seething, howling tangle of humanity)—there to receive the plainest of instructions. They were to quell the disorder and to single out for punishment, whenever possible, the strangers, the obvious authors of the rebellion, easily discernible by their scarlet blouses. Not that the judge was particular about the lives or deaths of a few natives; he knew that any injuries received by his countrymen would strengthen his case against the outsiders. But an order couched in such terms would look well in the records of the Court.

Within ten minutes the market-place was cleared. The militia had used their weapons with such precision that four school children, seven women, eleven islanders, and twenty-six apostles were wounded—about half of them, it was believed, mortally. Order reigned in Nepenthe.

The warm affiliation case having been laid on ice for the nonce, the next few minutes were occupied by His Worship in issuing warrants of arrest against the Messiah's followers. They were lodged by batches in gaol, and in supplementary gaols—disused cellars and so forth. Once under lock and key they were safe from mischief for an indefinite length of time, since, according to the statutes of the Code of Criminal Procedure, there is no reason on earth why an Italian lawsuit should ever end, or indeed, why it should ever begin. They might, and probably would, remain incarcerated for life, pending the commencement of a trial which could only be set in motion by the Judge himself—a most improbable conjuncture—or, failing that, by an extravagant bribe to his official superior, the President of the Court of Cassation. How were poor apostles to find the necessary sixty or seventy francs for such a venture?

His Worship retired to luncheon, reasonably satisfied with the morning's work. And yet not altogether delighted. Both the Messiah and Peter the Great had eluded his wrath. Peter was able to prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that he had spent the last twenty-four hours on Madame Steyn-

lin's premises and knew nothing whatever of occurrences in the outside world. In the face of such a fact—so conformable to common knowledge, so inherently probable—Malipizzo gave way. He was too good a lawyer to spoil his case. Sooner or later, he foresaw, that bird would be caged with the rest of them. Regarding the Messiah, an unexpected and breathless appeal for mercy was lodged by the communal doctor, atheist and freemason like the judge, who implored, with tears in his eyes, that the warrant for his arrest should be rescinded. By means of a sequence of rapid and intricate Masonic signs, he explained that Bazhakuloff was a patient of his; that he was undergoing a daily treatment with the stomach-pump; that the prison diet being notoriously slender, he feared that if he, the Messiah, were confined in captivity, then it, the stomach-pump, would be no longer required and therefore he, the physician, a family man, deprived of a small but regular source of income. Again the astute judge relented. This is how the Messiah and his disciple escaped.

They escaped, but not for long.

And all this happened while Mr. Keith and his companion, drowsily ensconced among the morocco cushions of their boat, were being wafted over the blue sea, far away, under the cliffs.

Chapter XXVII

"The Devil's rock, gentlemens! The rock of the Devil. Where the young English lord jump over. Everyone know that story."

The word "devil" caused the bishop to wake up from his pleasant dreams with something of a start.

"You had better take a good look at that cliff," suggested Mr. Keith. "It is not only the finest on the island but, I fancy, the finest on the whole Mediterranean. Those on the Spanish coast and on Mount Athos lack the wonderful colour and the clean surface of this one. Looks as if it had been done with a knife, doesn't it? Alpine crags seem vertical but are nearly always inclined; their primary rock, you know, cannot flake off abruptly like this tufa. This is a genuine precipice. Plumb!"

"Terrific," said Mr. Heard. "What was that about the English lord?"

"Two young fellows who rented the villa at the back of it for a summer. They used to bathe and

booze all day long. I was not on the island at the time, but of course I heard about it. One day the younger one jumped over the edge of the cliff for a bet; said he was going to dive. They never recovered his body. There is a strong current at this point. That's so, isn't it, Antonio?"

"That so, gentlemens. Drink branty all the time, both of them. But little one—everybody smile at him. Pretty boy. Swim and dive, something lovely. One evening both get drunk and walk along the edge of cliff up there. Then little one, he say: I good diver, eh, what, friend? Big one say: You dive prettier than dolphin.—What bet, over cliff here, now?—Six bottle branty.—Done! Clothes off, over he go, like a seabird. All finished. That so, gentlemens. Next morning they bring clothes to big one into house. Big one, when he wake up and see clothes lying there, with no friend inside, he very angry with servants and everybody else, and drink no more branty for three days. Damfool foreigners."

"That's a tragedy, anyhow," said the bishop.

"You are right. It is quite artistic—that touch about bringing back the clothes, the empty shell, next morning. Quite artistic."

Mr. Heard looked up at the crag. It made him dizzy to picture some human body hurtling through the air from that awful height. Its surface was of perfect smoothness. But what struck him even more was the uncommon and almost menacing colouration. The rock was bluish black, spattered

with maculations of a ruddy sanguine tint, as though drops of blood had oozed out, in places, from its stony heart.

"I remember Mrs. Meadows telling me that story," he said to Keith. "Isn't her villa at the back?"

"The very place. By the way, when next you call, would you please say something particularly nice *de ma part?* I don't see half enough of that lady, considering how much I like her. How is she?"

"Complains of headache."

"Headache? That is very unlike Mrs. Meadows. I always looked upon her as a bundle of steel springs. Perhaps something is wrong with the baby."

"Maybe," replied the bishop. "She seems to dote on it."

Then that last visit to his cousin suddenly recurred to him; he remembered her conversation—he thought of the lonely woman up there. Strange! Somehow or other, she had been at the back of his mind all the time. He decided to call again in a day or two.

Keith said:

"I should not like to come between her and the child. That woman is a tiger-mother. . . . Heard, there has been something on your mind all day long. What is it?"

"I believe there has. I'll try to explain. You know those Japanese flowers—" he began, and then broke off.

"I am glad you are becoming terrestrial at last.

Nothing like Mother Earth! You cannot think how much money I wasted on Japanese plants, especially bulbs, before I convinced myself that they cannot be grown on this soil."

"Those paper flowers, I mean, which we used to put in our finger-bowls at country dinner tables. They look like shrivelled specks of cardboard. But in the water they begin to grow larger and to unfold themselves into unexpected patterns of flowers of all colours. That is how I feel—expanding, and taking on other tints. New problems, new influences, are at work upon me. It is as if I needed altogether fresh standards. Sometimes I feel almost ashamed——"

"Ashamed? My dear Heard, this will never do. You must take a blue pill when we get home."

"Can it be the south wind?"

"Everybody blames the poor sirocco. I imagine you have long been maturing for this change, unbeknown to yourself. And what does it mean? Only that you are growing up. Nobody need be ashamed of growing up. . . . Here we are, at last! We will land at the little beach yonder, near the end of that gulley. You can go ashore and have a look at the old thermal establishment. It used to be a gay place with a theatre and ballrooms and banqueting rooms. Nobody dare enter it nowadays. Haunted! Perhaps you will see the ghost. As for me, I mean to take a swim. I always feel as if I needed a bath after talking about religion. You don't mind my saying so, do you?"

Mr. Heard, climbing upwards from the beach, felt as though he did not mind what anyone said about anything.

With the Devil's rock the most imposing tract of Nepenthean cliff-scenery came to an abrupt end. That mighty escarpment was its furthest outpost. Thereafter the land fell seawards no longer precipitously, but in wavy earthen slopes intersected by ravines which the downward-rushing torrents of winter had washed out of the loose soil. It was at the termination of one of these dry stream-beds that Mr. Heard set foot on shore. Panting under the relentless heat he wound his way along a path once carefully tended and engineered, but now crumbling to decay.

Before him, on a treeless brown eminence, silhouetted against the blue sky, stood the ruin. It was a fanciful woe-begone structure, utterly desolate. The plaster, gnawed away by winds laden with searching sea-moisture, had fallen to earth, exposing the underlying masonry of cheap construction whose rusty colour was the same as that of the ground from which it had arisen, and into which it now seemed ready and eager to descend. Everything useful or portable, everything that spoke of man's occupation, everything that suggested life and comfort—the porcelain tiles, woodwork, window-panes, roofings, mosaic or marble floors, leaden pipes—all this had been carried away long ago. It stood there stark, dismantled, de-humanized, in the midday heat. Here was nothing to charm the eye or con-

jure up visions of past glory; nothing elegant or romantic; nothing savouring of grim warlike purposes. It was a modern ruin; a pile of rubbish; a shameless, frivolous skeleton. Those hastily built walls and staring windows wore an air of faded futility, almost of indecency—as though the mouldering bones of some long-forgotten lady of pleasure had crept out of their tomb to give themselves an airing in the sunshine.

Mr. Heard, after glancing at what remained of a pretentious façade, stepped within.

Deep shade was here, in those of the chambers whose roofs remained intact; shade, and a steamy heat, and the noxious odour of some mineral product—the healing waters. He strayed in the twilight through halls and corridors, past ample saloons and rows of cells which had apparently served for convenience of disrobing. Everywhere that noisome smell accompanied his footsteps; the place was reeking with it. And all was in decay. Gaudy paper hung in tatters from the ceilings; the dust lay thick, undisturbed for generations. Unclean things littered in musty corners. Through gaping skylights a sunny beam would penetrate; it played about the mildewy stucco partitions encrusted, in patches, with a poisonous lichen of bright green. Wandering about this dank and mournful pile of wreckage, he could understand why simple folks should dread to enter so ghoul-haunted a spot.

Gladly he issued, by way of an obscure passage, into what had once been a trim garden. No trace

of flowers or shrubs remained; the walks, the ornamental stone seats and artificial terraces, were merging into brown earth. Here, in the centre of this ruined pleasaunce, the health-giving fountain had lately flowed, bubbling up in a conch-shaped basin of cement. It was now dry but a deep warmth still clung to its rim, whereon the mineral had left a comely deposit of opaline texture. Lowering his hand he felt an intermittent stream of hot air rising out of the ground, feeble as the breath of a dying man. Still some mysterious gusts of life down there, he concluded, in the dark earth. How curious that volcanic connection with the mainland, of which Count Caloveglia had spoken!

Soon he found himself beside the shattered framework of a small pavilion, built in a grotesque Chinese style and looking woefully out of place in this classic landscape, with the blue Tyrrhenian at its foot. And here he rested. He surveyed the traces of the old path leading down from the higher lands in serpentine meanderings; that path—once, doubtless, bordered by shady trees—whereby all those worldly invalids had once descended. He pictured the lively caravan afoot, on muleback, in sedan chairs, seeking health and pleasure at this site, now so void of life. Lower down, almost within a stone's-throw, lay the beach. The sailors, father and son, had drawn the boat up to the shore and were sitting huddled up on its shady side, with some food between them on a coloured handkerchief. That Brobdingnagian luncheon-basket had also been dis-

embarked. Keith was swimming, together with his two genii; he looked like a rosy Silenus. They seemed to be enjoying themselves vastly, to judge by the outbursts of laughter. Mr. Heard thought of going to join the fun, but gave up the idea; there was something astir that clogged his energies.

He knew them—these southern noons. If no ghost resided in the melancholy ruin hard by, there might well be some imponderable hostile essence afloat in the still air of midday. Anything, he felt, could happen at this unearthly hour. The wildest follies might be committed at the bidding of this unseen Presence.

He tried to recollect what Keith had told him concerning Muhlen, that corrupt personality. Retlow . . . where had he heard that name before? In vain he flogged his memory. There was an alien power in this brightness; a power as of a vampire that drained away his faculties, his vitality; a spirit of evil, exhaling from the sunny calm. It made a mock, a mirage, of the landscape which danced before his eyes; it distorted the realities of nature, the works of man. . . .

Presently he observed that Keith and his companions were clothed and occupied in dragging things out of the preposterous food-receptacle. They called up to him. The spell was released.

He descended.

"Nice bathe?" he enquired.

"Rather! And now these fellows will make a passable omelette, to begin with. I don't fancy cold

luncheons, do you? They seem to lie like lead on one's stomach."

"Are those sailors not coming with us?"

"No. They are well paid for their work. No doubt they would like to be in my service too. But I never employ islanders, except for casual jobs; it saves me all kinds of local trouble and family intrigues. Nor yet older people. They are so apt to think; and once a servant begins to think he ceases to be of use. I believe in the outsider, for all purposes of human intercourse. If you want a thing done, go to the outsider, the intelligent amateur. And when you marry, Heard, be sure to select a wife from another class, another province, another country—another planet, if possible. Otherwise you will repent it. Not that I see any objection, on principle, to incest; it strikes me as the most natural proceeding in the world——"

"Dear me!"

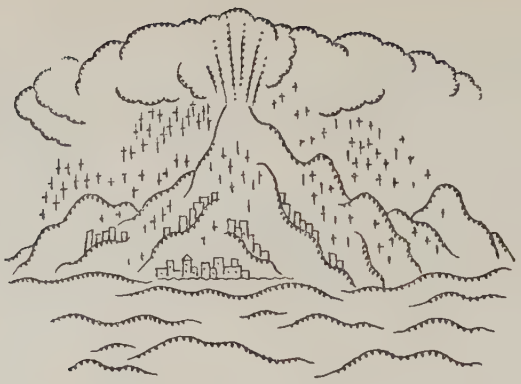
"And yet—that inexplicable prejudice. It is probably artificial and of modern origin. I suspect the priestly caste. Royal families kept up the custom and do so still, like that of Siam. Odd, how anachronisms linger longest at the two poles of society. What do you say," he went on, "to climbing a little up that gorge, into the shade? I cannot digest properly with the sun staring at me. And tell me, as we go along, your impressions of the ruin. . . . I perceive drawbacks to incest; grave practical drawbacks—sterility, inbreeding. Yes, there is obviously something to be said for exogamy.

Audi alteram partem, as Eames might say, though God knows why he thinks it sounds better in Latin. Seen the ghost?"

The bishop remembered a certain answer given him by Madame Steynlin, to whom he had once spoken of the "tonic" effects of Keith's conversation.

"A tonic?" she had said. "Very likely! But not a tonic for men and women. A tonic for horses."

After luncheon they improvised a shelter in order to repose awhile. It was the right thing to do on Nepenthe at that hour of the day, and Mr. Keith tried to conform to custom even under unusual circumstances such as these. Protected by the boat's scarlet awning from the rays of the sun, they slumbered through the flaming hours.



Chapter XXVIII

The Duchess was a good sleeper, as befitted a person of regular habits and pure life.

It was her custom to retire for the night at about eleven o'clock. Angelina, who reposed in an adjoining room, would enter softly at nine in the morning, draw up the blinds, and deposit a cup of tea at the bedside of her mistress. Up to that moment, she would slumber like a child. Rarely did she suffer from insomnia or nightmare. On this particular night, however, her rest was troubled by a strange and disquieting dream.

She was a little girl once more, at her parental home out West. All the old memories were around her. It was winter time. She was alone, out of doors. Snow, the familiar snow, was falling from a sombre sky; already it lay deep on the boundless plains. It fell without ceasing. The sky grew darker. Hours seemed to pass, and still the flakes descended. It was not cold snow. It was warm

snow—warm and rather suffocating. Very suffocating. It began to choke her. Suddenly she found she could breathe no more. She gave a wild cry of despair——

Her maid was standing beside the bed, a lighted candle in her hand. Otherwise the room was in pitch darkness. Angelina looked like a Tanagra statuette. Draped in nothing but a clinging nightgown that reached two inches below the knee and accentuated the charm of her figure, with the candle-light throwing playful gleams upon her neck and cheeks, Angelina was an apparition to gladden the heart of man.

The heart of the Duchess was not gladdened by any means.

"What is the meaning of this, girl?" she enquired sternly, in what she took to be the language of the country. "And in the middle of the night!"

"It's nine o'clock, Madam."

"Nine o'clock? Then draw the blinds."

"I've drawn them." She stepped to the window and tapped on the glass panes by way of confirmation. "All dark outside," she added. "Ashes are falling from heaven. The volcano is very, very angry."

"Ashes? The volcano? I must dress at once. Light two more candles. No, three! We can't have three candles burning. Don Francesco may be here at any moment."

The Duchess often laughingly described herself as "only a weak woman." A certain number of

persons concurred in that opinion. Just then she was the most self-possessed inhabitant of Nepenthe. The disturbance of nature left her undisturbed. Her intellect was naturally incurious as to the habits of volcanoes; her soul, moreover, in good hands, her conscience in excellent working order, as befitted a potential convert to Catholicism. She could rely on a spiritual adviser who had instilled into her mind a lofty sense of obedience and resignation. Don Francesco would never desert her. He would arrive in due course, explaining why God had allowed the volcano to behave in this unseemly fashion, and brimming over with words of consolation for his daughter-to-be. God, if so disposed, could work a miracle and drive away the plague, even as he had sent it. Ashes or no ashes, all was for the best. Calmly she waited.

Out of doors, meanwhile, the shower went on without ceasing. It had begun shortly after midnight; the ground was covered to the depth of two inches. Nepenthe lay veiled in Cimmerian gloom, darker than starless midnight—a darkness that could be felt; a blanket, as it were, hot and breathless, weighing upon the landscape. All was silent. No footfall could be heard in the streets; the powdery ashes, softer than snow, absorbed every sound. And still they fell. Those few scared natives whom necessity forced to go abroad crept about in fear of their lives. They thought the end of the world had come. Terror-stricken, they carried knives and revolvers in their pockets; they passed

each other distrustfully in the streets holding, in one hand, a lighted torch or lantern, and in the other a handkerchief pressed to the face for fear of suffocation. In one or two of the shop windows could be discerned a light glimmering feebly as through the thickest fog. All the ordinary sights and sounds of morning—the vehicles plying for hire, the cracking of whips, the cries of the fish and fruit vendors—all were gone. The deathly stillness was broken only by the clangour of the town clock, tolling the hours into a darkened world.

Half a dozen adventurous spirits had gathered together at the Club. They called themselves adventurous. As a matter of fact they were scared out of their wits and had gone there merely with a view of leaning on each other for mutual support and courage. There was no whisky drinking that morning, no cards, no scandal-mongering. They sat round a table under an acetylene lamp, anxiously listening to a young professor from Christiania who claimed to be versed in the higher mathematics and was then occupied in calculating, by means of the binomial theorem, how long it would take for the whole town of Nepenthe to be submerged under ashes up to the roofs—presuming all the buildings to be of equal height. He was a new-comer to the place and, for that reason, rather a cheerful pessimist. He thought it quite possible that before the second floors of the houses had been reached—granted, of course, that none was higher or lower than the other—the wind might change

and carry the ashes elsewhere. His demonstration had a depressing effect on the hearts of those who had lived longer on the island. They rose from the table and sadly shook their heads, prepared for the worst. They knew their sirocco.

As morning wore on other stragglers entered the premises, muffled up to the ears; they scattered ashes from their cloaks and hastily closed the door behind them. More lamps were lighted. The news was not inspiriting. It was dark as ever outside; you could not see your hand before your face; the shower had accumulated to an alarming extent. Some roofs had fallen in under the weight of ashes; telegraphic communication with the mainland was interrupted owing, it was supposed, to the snapping of the cable in some submarine convulsion; a man had stumbled in the market-place over the dead body of a woman —choked, no doubt; two of the judge's Russian prisoners, unaccustomed to volcanic phenomena, had gone stark staring mad and disembowelled one another with a carving knife. Mr. Muhlen, who presently turned up in anything but his usual sprightly humour, was furnished with a full and corrected version of this last affair, to the effect that there were not two, but fourteen, of these victims; that prior to their frenzied act they had partaken of bread and salt and sung the national anthem; that the instrument chosen was not a carving knife but a rusty chisel. None of his listeners seemed to be greatly moved by what, under ordinary circumstances, would have been a valuable

contribution to the entertainment. They were waiting for the appearance of their president, the Commissioner, the life and soul of the place, who would be able to give them an official apology for this scandalous outbreak of nature. The Commissioner, for once in his life, failed to perform his duty.

That unfortunate man was sitting at home, in the remote villa known as the "Residency," profoundly troubled in mind. He leaned over his study table, which was lighted by a lamp; his eyes peered dejectedly, through the windows beyond, into the gloom. Before him lay the skeleton draft of his annual report to the Nicaraguan Minister of Finance, a gentleman who developed a passionate craving, once a year, to be informed of the condition of Nepenthe in regard to matters such as shipping and trade returns, zymotic diseases, and the methods locally employed for combating beriberi.

The elaboration of this report had hitherto given Mr. Freddy Parker no trouble whatever. It was an understood thing between himself and his protector, Senor Pomponio di Vergara y Puyarola, that his labours need not be otherwise than purely formal. To every one of the intelligent queries on the part of a paternal government it had been his custom, therefore, to append the magic word *nil*. Banking system—*nil*. Meat export—*nil*. Cotton industry —*nil*. Agriculture—*nil*. Canal traffic—*nil*. Teak trade—*nil*. Emery mines—*nil*. Fisheries—*nil*.

He could trust Senor de Vergara to arrange matters, in the event of any complaint arising as to the unwarranted ambiguity or succinctness of the Nepenthean Report.

Bad news had just reached him; very bad news indeed. His friend and protector had been stabbed to death, after the approved fashion of Nicaraguan politicians, by a couple of assassins in the pay of that minister's rival, a bankrupt tradesman who, desirous of bettering his fortunes, conceived that he would make as good a Finance Minister as anyone else and had, in fact, already usurped that post. Worse news could hardly be imagined. The prognosis was most unfavourable. For Mr. Parker shrewdly argued that a rival of the late Don Pomponio would look askance at those whom His Excellency had exalted—at himself, for instance. And what then? However conscientiously he might henceforward edit the report, he realized that his position was no longer secure; he was liable to be recalled at any moment—to cede his place to some candidate of the opposing faction. Those damned republics! Or the post, being a purely honorary one created expressly for himself by the obliging and now defunct Don Pomponio, might be permanently abolished. It was not a pleasant prospect. Mr. Freddy Parker was rather too old to start knocking about the world again. He was losing what he called his "nerve." What was to be done?

He tugged at his beard and puffed furious clouds of smoke out of his briar pipe. He thought of

another grief—another source of anxiety. The quarterly remittance forwarded to him by certain obscure but respectable relatives in England, under the condition that he should never again set foot in that land of honest men, had not arrived. It was two weeks overdue. What had happened? Had they decided to cancel it? They had threatened to do so ere now. And if so, how was he going to live? It was a facer, that was. The equivalent of fifteen pounds sterling was urgently necessary at that very moment. Fifteen pounds. Who would lend him fifteen pounds? Keith? Not likely. Keith was a miser—a Scotchman, ten to one. Koppen? He had once already tried to touch him for a loan, with discouraging results. A most unsympathetic millionaire. Almost offensive, the old bounder had been. Perhaps somebody had let on about that bit of *crêpe de Chine* preserved at the Residency, and its uses as a sociological document. How things got about on Nepenthe! Where the Hell, then, was money to come from?

Both these troubles, great in themselves, faded into insignificance before a new and overwhelming sorrow.

In a room directly overhead lay the dead body of his lady. She had breathed her last on the previous midday, and it is more than likely that the noise of the cannon-shots, reverberating through her chamber, had accelerated her end; not the noise as such, for she was naturally a rowdy woman and never felt comfortable save in an atmosphere of

domestic explosions and quarrels with servants, but the noise in its social significance, the noise as demonstrating to her exhausted consciousness that there was something wrong, something at the same time of considerable importance—something she might never live to comment on—happening in the market-place. In other words, it is highly probable that her death had been hastened by the moral rather than the physical shock of the noise; by disappointment; by the bitter reflection that she would never survive to learn what this new scandal, evidently an interesting one, was about.

The doctor, for reasons which he deemed sufficient, had recommended a speedy interment; it was fixed for that morning. The fall of ashes had put the ceremony out of the question. There she lay. And in the room below sat her bereaved stepbrother, distractedly gazing out of the window upon the darkness of Erebus.

It harmonized with the darkness of his mourning trousers, newly creased but not newly purchased; and of his soul. He saw his worldly existence menaced—tottering to its fall. All these catastrophes, so crushing, so unexpected, filled him with a kind of primeval terror. Mr. Parker was neither a devout believer nor the reverse. He was a fool and liable, as such, under the stress of bodily or mental disturbance, to spasmodic fits of abject fright which he mistook for religion. An attack of indigestion, the failure of some pecuniary speculation, the demise of a beloved stepsister—these

various happenings, so dissimilar to one another, had yet this feature in common, that they put the fear of God into the otherwise empty brain of Mr. Parker.

He had been in many tight corners, but never in so tight a corner as this. Hardly ever. He thought of the lady lying dead upstairs and all she had done towards establishing and consolidating their social position; how she had economized for him, yes, and lied for him—better, far better, than he could ever hope to lie. For she possessed that most priceless of all gifts: she believed her own lies. She looked people straight in the face and spoke from her heart; a falsehood, before it left her lips, had grown into a flaming truth. She was a florid, improvident liar. There was no classical parsimony about her misstatements. They were copious, baroque, and encrusted with pleasing and unexpected tricks of ornamentation. That tropical redundancy for which her person was renowned reflected itself likewise in her temperament—in nothing more than the exuberance of her untruths which were poured out in so torrential a flood, with such burning conviction and opulence of detail that persons who knew her well used to stand aghast (Catholics had been known to cross themselves) at the fertility of her constructive imagination; while the most hardened sceptics protested that, even if her facts were wrong, there could be no doubt as to her sincerity, her ingenuousness. Ah, she was a woman in a thousand! Often had Mr. Parker sat at her feet, a

respectful disciple, listening spellbound, and striving to acquire that secret—a secret which was, after all, not so much art as nature. He could never hope to rival her technique.

That was because he could not look you in the face; because he disbelieved not only his own lies, but those of other people—and not only their lies, but their truths; because he distrusted everything and everybody, and was duly distrusted in his turn. Nobody believed a word he said, and some rude persons went so far as to tell him exactly what they thought of him. They called him a liar, in public and in private. Such experiences are trying to one's nerve; they end in giving you a shifty look. People who knew him well never took his word for granted, and the more casual acquaintances would say that even if his facts were correct now and then he could not help being a fraud all the same.

And now she was gone, this lady who had saved him from countless small annoyances, who had given him self-esteem and a kind of social backbone. He stared into the darkness. Where was money to come from—those miserable fifteen pounds, for example? What would happen?

He almost decided upon praying, only he could not think of appropriate words in which to appeal for this loan; it might seem to the Deity a contemptuously small sum, not worth bothering the angels about. On the other hand he dared not apply for more than he actually needed—not to that quarter, at least—for fear of being found out. He

was always being found out, even by his earthly creditors. Besides, there lingered at the back of his mind all the time certain doubts as to the efficacy of applying to God for money or anything else. The whole thing might be a farce. He remembered, with pain and grief, that he had already on several occasions tried the prayer-system, like most other systems. And alas, the results had invariably been *nil*. . . .

Chapter XXIX

A visit from His Reverence the *parroco* was announced.

This heroic priest, accompanied by two acolytes bearing torches, had braved the downpour of ashes. He never shirked his duty. It was his duty that morning to confer with Mr. Parker anent the delayed funeral and other painfully material matters. For the deceased lady had not deserted the creed of her fathers; she was an ardent Catholic—so ardent that she professed great pain at her stepbrother's alien leanings and had taken considerable trouble to convert him to her own way of thinking. She used to say, in her flowery language, that his contumacious attitude towards the true Faith gnawed at her vitals—meaning, presumably, that it annoyed her. Often she pointed out how many social and other advantages they would gain—living in a Catholic country—if he, too, could bring himself to enter the fold of believers. In vain! The Com-

missioner had a knack of being ultra-protestant on such occasions.

Not that he greatly cared to what Church he belonged. But if nobody made it worth his while —why, he remained an Englishman. He knew perfectly well that the *parroco,* his lady's confessor, was anxious to do something in the proselytizing line which might lower the prestige of Don Francesco. And he was clever enough to realize that, by embracing Catholicism at Torquemada's hands, he, the Official Representative of Nicaragua, would be putting a feather in the priest's cap. He was not going to put a feather in anybody's cap—not for nothing. It was not good enough. Some strong leader of nations had once remarked "Every man his price." Mr. Parker liked that phrase; he was deeply convinced of its veracity. He also had his price, and once, in a moment of extreme financial embarrassment, he had delighted his stepsister by announcing that he was prepared to consider the question of conversion. He then named his price. It was a condition not to be expressed by such terms as a gratified church might have been able to concede—by some elevation to a higher sphere of influence or other worldly favour; it was a figure badly commercial, expressible, that is, in pounds, shillings and pence.

"You've got some cheek, Freddy," was all she could bring herself to say.

"My dear Lola, he can take it or leave it," the Commissioner had replied, sulkily.

His Reverence never found himself in the odious dilemma of either taking or leaving it, for the lady was wise enough not to divulge so ignoble a proposition.

But now, while the good priest uttered a few parting platitudes of condolence, the other was revolving in his mind how negotiations—direct negotiations, this time—could be opened up. He needed fifteen pounds; well, one might be able to do a little juggling with the Club money for that part of the business. It was necessary, above all, to devise some means whereby the Nicaraguan Government might be induced to keep him at his old post. Here was Torquemada. How could the fellow be turned to account?

"The Nuncio!" he suddenly thought. A Catholic republic like Nicaragua was sure to have a Papal Nuncio, whatever that might be; and if he became a convert to the official faith of that country, the Nuncio would be delighted and might whisper in the ear of the President a few words commending his act and requesting that so good a servant of the Church should not be despoiled of his post. And if the President, himself a Catholic, could be brought to share this view, then he, Freddy Parker, could snap his fingers at the machinations of Senor Vergara's successor.

He decided to show some signs of devotion to what he had been accustomed to call the grossest of superstitions; to reveal symptoms of latent Roman proclivities. Grief seemed to have sharpened his

wits, for an inspiration came to him. After the sordid and melancholy details of the funeral had been discussed yet again—it was to take place as soon as ever the state of the sky would allow of it—Mr. Parker, pointing to the blackened world outside, made an oracular remark.

"Something must be done," he said.

His companion agreed, very heartily. But soon he drew a deep sigh. How could a volcanic eruption be stopped? In other words, what must be done?

"Let me suggest something, *parroco*. Why not organize a procession at once, a penitential procession? Such things take place during eruptions on the mainland. Why not here?"

It was the most tactful and diplomatic proposal that the Commissioner had ever made. A thundering good tip, in fact. How proud his Lola would have been, had she heard him make it! A flash of inspiration—and he was actually following it up. The effect was instantaneous. At the sound of that word "procession" the other's thin lips relaxed, and into his ferrety eyes there came a gentler look. He was pleased, infinitely pleased. The Protestant Commissioner betraying only too plainly the heart of a Catholic—that augured well. But difficulties, apparently insurmountable, presented themselves.

"That thought, Signor Parker, coming from you, gives me pleasure beyond words. But I question whether a procession can be formed. Even the priests, most of them, would not care to attend. As to the populace—who is going to risk his life

in the midst of this calamity? We might all be choked to death. Not that I would hesitate to play my becoming part!"

"You know your people—how inquisitive they are. If you toll the church bells a certain number are sure to gather in the market-place in order to learn, even at risk of their lives, what is happening. When they see a torch-lit procession being formed, you will obtain a sufficient quantity, I feel sure, to carry the Holy Image of the Saint; and some to spare. Also, I see no reason why the priests should be present in full strength. Toll the bells, *parroco!* You will get your men."

His Reverence was thinking hard. At last he said:

"Your project appeals to me. It does credit to your heart. It would do credit to our island. I will try to arrange it. But if——"

"You mean, don't you, if the ashes continue to fall, notwithstanding our expiatory demonstration? Let me see. There was that disgraceful tumult in the town yesterday. Saint Dodekanus is perhaps too deeply vexed against his people to concede them a grace under such circumstances. I imagine him to be very displeased with us just now. That being the case, the fall of ashes might well be permitted to continue for our castigation, despite the penitential act. What do you think?"

Nobody knows what the *parroco* thought. It was not his habit to think aloud, much less to express opinions on ticklish arguments such as these.

But he could corroborate the fact with a clear conscience.

"It was indeed enough to anger a saint in Heaven! Seven more of the wounded have succumbed to their injuries; three of them little children. Ah, these deeds of violence and bloodshed, for which Nepenthe was ever infamous! When will the peace of God descend upon our island?"

Mr. Parker had no idea when that might happen. He was not particularly keen about the peace of God—he was keen about keeping his job. None the less, he managed to move his head up and down, in a decidedly becoming fashion.

"And now," concluded the *parroco,* "with your kind permission, I will take my leave, to confer with the clergy, if I can discover any of them, as to what can be done towards forming a procession. I confess that the more I think upon your idea, Signor Parker, the more I like it. If only we can find a sufficient number to participate!"

"Have no fear of that. Only toll the bells. You will get your men. This eruption is enough to make anybody religious. I mean—you know what I mean, *parroco.*"

The acolytes having rekindled their torches, His Reverence, a happier man, stepped boldly out of doors and was swallowed up in the murk.

This is a succinct and faithful account of the genesis of that procession which was to become famous in Nepenthean annals. However much, in later years, certain envious folks might claim to be

the originators of the project it was, from first to last, the Commissioner's idea. Honour to whom honour is due. He deserved, and took, all credit for it. Meanwhile he sat down at his table once more, and stared into the pitchy darkness.

Not long afterwards, the sound of bells announced that something was being done. Men looked out of their windows and saw flickering lights moving about the gloom. The flames grouped themselves into definite arrangement; a procession was being formed. As the *parroco* had foretold, it was but sparsely attended in the beginning; out of sixty-five priests and canons of the church, only fourteen found it convenient to attend; another dozen, however, were presently shamed into taking their places in the ranks. The same with the followers. Their number gradually increased. For the bells did the work of arousing curiosity; they tolled plangently into the night.

Stranger pageant never trod Nepenthe. Some thoughtful person had discovered that umbrellas might be used with advantage. Umbrellas were therefore utilized by all save the priests, the choristers, torch-bearers, and those carrying the statue of the Saint who, for reasons of personal dignity or expediency, preferred the other method. They chanted their psalms and litanies through handkerchiefs, knowing full well that their music would be none the less pleasing to the Saint for being more than usually nasal in tone. Thus, with soundless footfalls, they perambulated the streets and out-

skirts of the town, gathering fresh recruits as they went.

And still the ashes fell.

Viewing this cortège of awe-struck innocents braying into the blackness under their umbrellas at the heels of a silverplated idol (not yet paid for), an intelligent God might well be proud of his workmanship. So thought the *parroco*. He was undismayed. Come what might, he had an explanation ready. Saint Dodekanus, if the ashes continued to fall, was only showing his displeasure; he was perfectly justified in letting his wrath be known for the better guidance of mankind. Certain of the younger priests, on the other hand, were growing nervous at the prospect of a possible failure of the procession. They began to blame His Reverence for what he had given them to understand was his own idea. For two hours they had now been in movement; they had swallowed a hatful of ashes. And yet no sign from Heaven. The sky appeared darker than ever. Many of the followers, exhausted, dropped out of the procession and returned sadly to their homes. They thought the speculation was going to turn out badly. The others deemed it not impossible that the Saint could not see them through so thick a curtain. Well then, he might hear them. They chanted more furiously.

The sound must have reached Heaven at last, for a miracle occurred. The gloom decreased in density. Men looked up and beheld a sickly radiance overhead—it was the sun, ever so far away; it

shone as when seen through thickly smoked glasses. Then a veil seemed to be withdrawn. The light grew clearer—the song of the penitents jubilant with hope. Sullen gleams, now, pierced the murky air. Outlines of trees and houses crept furtively into their old places. The fall of ashes had almost ceased. With a wrench, as it seemed, the final covering was drawn away. The land lay flooded in daylight.

That pæan of joy and thanksgiving which ought to have greeted this divine largesse, died on the lips of the beholders when they saw the state of their island. Nepenthe was hardly recognizable. The Saint had lifted a mantle from Heaven only to reveal the desolation on earth. Ashes everywhere. Trees, houses, the fertile fields, the mountain slopes —all were smothered under a layer of monotonous pallor. They knew what it meant. It meant ruin to their crops and vineyards. None the less, they raised a shout, a half-hearted shout, of praise. For Nepentheans are born politicians and courteous by nature. It is their heritage from the Good Duke Alfred to "keep smiling." A shout was expected of them under the circumstances; it costs nothing and may even do good, inasmuch as Saint Dodekanus could remove the ashes as easily as he had sent them. Why not shout?

"A miracle, a miracle!" the cry went up. "Long life to our patron!"

A poor tribute; but the Saint took note of it. Half an hour had barely passed ere the sky grew

cloudy. Moist drops began to fall. It was the first rain for many weeks, and foreign visitors, accustomed to think of Nepenthe as a rainless land, were almost as interested in the watery shower as in that of ashes. Mud, such mud as the oldest midwife could not remember, encumbered the roofs, the fields, the roadways. It looked as if the whole island were plastered over with a coating of liquid chocolate. Now, if the shower would only continue——

Suddenly it ceased. The sky grew clear.

Saint Dodekanus had often been accused of possessing a grain of malice. Some went so far as to say he had the Evil Eye. It was by no means the first time in his long career that the natives had found cause to complain of a certain rancour in his temperament—of certain spiteful viperish acts to which the priests, and they alone, were able to give a benevolent interpretation. Now their wrath blazed out against the celestial Patron. "He's not fit for his job," said some; "let's get a new saint! The ruffian, the son of an impure mother—up to his tricks, was he? Ah, the cut-throat, the Saracen, the old pæderast: into the ditch with him!"

During a brief moment his fate hung in the balance. For it was plain that the ashes, if unwetted, might ultimately have been blown away by the wind. But what was going to happen when all this mud, baked by the sun into the hardness of brick, covered the island?

Perhaps the Saint was only putting their tempers to the test. The experiment of another shout was

worth trying. One could always punish him later on.

So feeble was the noise that Saint Dodekanus must have had good ears. He had. And soon showed his real feelings. Rain fell once more. Instead of diminishing it grew more violent, accompanied by warm blasts of wind. There was sunshine overhead, but the peaks were shrouded in scudding vapours, trees bent under the force of the wind; the sea, a welter of light and shade, was dappled with silvery patches under the swiftly careering clouds. Soon there came a blinding downpour. Gullies were blocked up with mud; rills carried tons of it into the sea. Then the gale died down; the sun beamed out of a bright evening sky. The miraculous shower was over.

Men walked abroad and recognized their beloved Nepenthe once more. It glowed in tenderest hues. The events of morning and midday were like a bad dream. Everything sparkled with unaccustomed brilliance; the land was refreshed—swept clean; the sea alone remained discoloured to a dingy brown. Truly, as the Commissioner—once more a sound Protestant—remarked in later years: "The old rotter came up to the scratch that time." So clear and pleasant was the air that it seemed as if the wind had actually veered to the north. But no. It still blew from the other quarter—the old familiar sirocco. Which proved that the shower of ashes had not been "carried elsewhere," as the youthful teacher of mathematics had prognosticated. It had

not been carried anywhere. It simply ceased to fall, the volcano having momentarily run out of its stock of objectionable materials.

The Clubmen, therefore, calling to mind the discussion of the morning, were led to revise their opinion as to that gentleman's intelligence. They remembered one or two things. They remembered that even when Heavenly Powers are not known to be directly interested in the event, eruptions now and then come to an end quite irrespective of the wind—a contingency which had not been foreseen in the acute young Scandinavian's computations.

"That comes," they said, "of studying the higher mathematics. . . ."

For their miraculous deliverance from a shower of volcanic ashes the islanders gave all credit, as might have been expected, to their Patron Saint. And this proves how inadequately causes and effects are understood, here on earth. For the priests, the most intelligent section of the populace, knew perfectly well that but for the orders of the *parroco* no procession could have taken place. The Saint would have remained locked up in his musty shrine, without the faintest chance of performing a miracle of any kind. They argued, consequently, that Saint Dodekanus got the credit for what was really the *parroco's* notion. And Torquemada, thinking over the day's proceedings, was driven to confess that he was indebted for the suggestion to the fertile brain of the Nicaraguan Representative; in other words that he, the *parroco,* was praised for what

was really the Commissioner's idea. And it is evident that if Mr. Parker's lady had not died from the effects of a mosquito-sting, that gentleman would never have been in such a complex funk as to suggest a procession to the worthy priest.

Thus it came about that the Commissioner, the Parish Priest, and the Patron Saint, got the credit for what was really an insect's work.

Which shows how a mosquito can cure an eruption.

Chapter XXX

Everybody was drunk that night in honour of the Saint's bounty, though Miss Wilberforce reached the climax of her activities at the early hour of 4 p.m.—during the torchlight procession.

An uproar had been generated at the Club; chairs were broken, bottles smashed, and sporting prints kicked about—all on account of a comical but rather scurrilous speech, contrasting Europe with Australasia, by a new-comer, a member of the New Zealand House of Representatives, who limped home not long afterwards with a damaged shin-bone and black eye. The more violent parties had been ejected during that incident, or carried to their lodgings. Only about half the usual number was left—all moderates, so far as drinking was concerned, but all more or less screwed that day as befitted the occasion. There was the card-table group, where Mr. Muhlen, with heightened colour in his cheeks, was losing money in so brilliant a

fashion that everyone swore he must be on the verge of coming into a legacy or making some *coup* with a rich woman. In another room the so-called bawdy section, presided over by the dubious Mr. Hopkins, were discussing topics not adapted to polite ears. The artistic group, sadly thinned by the ejection of four of its more imaginative and virile members who had distinguished themselves in the fray, now consisted solely of two youngsters, a black-and-white man and a literary critic; they sat in a corner by themselves, talking about colour-values in maudlin strains.

The ordinary club-group had, as usual, installed themselves in the most comfortable chairs on the balcony. They were boozing steadily, like gentlemen, and having no end of fun with the poor little Norwegian professor and his miscalculations. One of them—a venerable toper of Anacreontic youthfulness known as Charlie, who turned up on Nepenthe at odd intervals and whom the oldest inhabitant of the place had never seen otherwise than in a state of benevolent fuddle—was saying to him:

"Instead of filling yourself up with whisky in that disgusting fashion, my friend, you ought to travel. Then you wouldn't make such an exhibition of yourself as you did this afternoon over those ashes. Talk about volcanoes! Ever seen the Lake of Pitch in Trinidad? Queer place, Trinidad. You never know where you are. Though I can't say I saw much of it myself. I was asleep most of the time, gentlemen, and often tight. Mostly both. All

angles and things, as you sail along. To get an idea of that place, you must take a banana, for instance, and cut it in half, and cut that in half again, and that half in half again—the banana, mind you, must always remain the same size—or suppose you keep on peeling a potato, and peeling, and peeling—well, Mr. Professor, what are you laughing at now?"

"I was thinking what an interesting map one could draw of Trinidad if it's like that."

"Interesting? That's not the word. It's Hell. I wouldn't care to take on that job, not even to oblige my poor old mother who died fifty years ago. Ever been to Trinidad, Mr. Richards? Or you, Mr. White? Or anybody? What, has nobody been to Trinidad? You ought to travel more, gentlemen. How about you, Mr. Samuel?"

"Never further West than the Marble Arch. But a friend of mine kept a ranch somewhere down there. One day he shot a skunk. Yes, Mr. White, a skunk."

"A skunk? I'm blowed. What on earth ever for did he do that? What did he want with a skunk? I thought they were protected by law to keep down rattlesnakes. That's so, isn't it, Charlie?"

"Snakes. You should see them in Trinidad. Snakes. Great Scott! It's a queer place, is Trinidad. All angles and things——"

"I don't think one can talk about a place being all angles and things, unless——"

"Tell me, Charlie, what did the fellow on the ranch want to do with that rattlesnake?"

"Couldn't say, my son. Maybe he thought of sending it to his mother. Or perhaps he didn't want the skunk to get hold of its tail: see?"

"I see."

"They're very sensitive about their tails. As ticklish as any young girl, I'm told."

"As bad as all that, are they?"

"I don't think one can talk about angles when describing an island or even a continent, except in a figurative and flowery fashion. As teacher of geometry, it is my business to dwell among angles; and the thirty-five boys in my class will bear witness to the fact that my relations with angles, great and small, are above reproach. I admit that there are angles everywhere, and that a man who really likes their company will stumble against them in the most unexpected places. But they are sometimes hard to see, unless one deliberately looks for them. I think Charlie must have been looking for them in Trinidad."

"I said angles *and things*, and I always stick to what I say. *And things.* You will be good enough, Mr. Professor, to draw your map accordingly."

"Gentlemen! I rise to a point of order. Our Indian friend here is greatly annoyed. He has been accused of wearing stays. At his urgent request I have convinced myself, by personal inspection, that he wears nothing of the kind. He is naturally slim-waisted, as befits a worthy representative of the noble Hairyan race. It has also been suggested that he loses caste by his present mode of conduct. He

begs me to say that, being a Jamshi-worshipper, he doesn't care a brass farthing about caste. Thirdly, he has been blamed in certain quarters for his immoderate indulgence in Parker's poison. Let me tell you, gentlemen, in my capacity as Vice-president, that for the last four thousand years his family has enjoyed a special dispensation from the Great Mogul, authorizing the eldest son to drink whatever he damn well pleases. Our friend here happens to be the third son. But that is obviously not his fault. If it were, he would have come forward with an apology long ago. Gentlemen! I can't speak fairer than that. Whoever says I'm not a gentleman—why, he isn't one either."

"Hear, hear! I never knew you were an ornithologist, Richards."

"Nor did I—not till this moment. But when it's a question of defending the honour of a Club-member I always rise to the occasion. Some things—they simply make my blood boil. Look at this *Referee:* two weeks out of date! How the blazes is a man——"

"I say, Charlie, what did the fellow on the ranch want to do with that skunk? Something about tickling, wasn't it?"

"Hush, my boy. We can't talk about it here. You're not old enough yet. I don't think I ought to tell you. It's too funny for words. . . ."

"You're a black-and-white man and I'm a writer, and really, you know, we're a cut above all those

sots on the balcony. Now just be reasonable for a moment. Look here. Have you ever thought about the impossibility of realizing colour description in landscape? It's struck me a good deal lately, here, with this blue sea, and those orange tints on the mountain, and all the rest of it. Take any page by a well-known writer—take a description of a sunset by Symonds, for example. Well, he names all the gorgeous colours, the yellow and red and violet, or whatever it may be, as he saw them. But he can't make you see them—damned if he can. He can only throw words at your head. I'm very much afraid, my dear fellow, that humanity will never get its colour-values straightened out by means of verbal symbols."

"I always know when a man is drunk, even when I'm drunk myself."

"When?"

"When he talks about colour-values."

"I believe you're right. I'm feeling a bit muzzy about the legs, as if I couldn't move. A bit fuzzy——"

"Muzzy, I think you said."

"Fuzzy."

"Muzzy. But we needn't quarrel about it, need we? I shall be sick in a minute, old man."

"It's rather hard on a fellow to be always misunderstood. However, as I was saying when you interrupted me, I am feeling slightly wobblish in the peripatetic or ambulatorial department. But my head's all right. Now do be serious, for a change.

You don't seem to catch my drift. This blue sea, and those orange tints on the mountains, I mean to say—how are they going to be held fast by the optic apparatus? The lens, you understand. I want to be able to shove them into a sketch-book, like you fellows. Well, how? That's what I want to know. How to turn my retina into a canvas."

"Rot, my good sir."

"It may be rot to you, but it strikes me as rather unfortunate, all the same, when you come to think of it. This blue sea, I mean, and those orange tints and all that, you know. Take a sunrise by John Addington. Of course, as a matter of fact, we ought both to have been born in another age—an age of sinecures. Why are sinecures extinct? I feel as if I could be Governor of Madagascar at this moment."

"I feel as if you were getting slightly intoxicated."

"That's me. But it's only my legs. My head is astonishingly clear. And I do wish you would try, just for once in a way, to follow my meaning. Be reasonable, for a change! I mean to say that a man has talents for all sorts of things. I, for example, have pronounced views upon agriculture. But what's the use of farming without capital? What I mean to say is this: we see the blue sea and the orange tints on the mountains, and all that, I mean, and we don't seem to realize, I mean, that we may die at any moment and never see them again. How few people grasp that simple fact! It's enough to

make one sick. Or do you think it's a laughing matter?"

"Bally rotten, I call it. You're quite right. People don't realize things the way they ought, except in a few selected moments. They live like animals. I shall be sick in a minute, old man."

"Like animals. Good Lord! You've hit the nail on the head this time. How true that is. Like animals. Like animals. Like animals."

"I know what we want. We want fresh air. No more Parker's poison for me. Let's take a stroll."

"I would if I could. But I can't get off this chair, damn it. I shall fall down if I move an inch. I can hardly turn my head, as it is. Awfully sorry. You don't mind, do you?"

"Gad! That's awkward. Couldn't we take your chair along with us, somehow? I'm going to be sick, I tell you, this very minute."

"Not here, not here! Third on the left. But surely, my dear fellow, you can put it off a little longer? Can't you be reasonable, for once in your life? Just for once in your life? Do listen to what those inebriated lunatics are saying on the balcony. . . ."

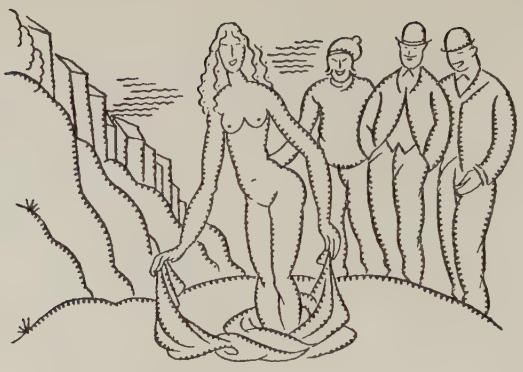
"What did you do to that skunk, Charlie?"

"Not if I know it, young man. I promised my mother I'd never tell. Another day, perhaps, when I've got a little whisky inside me. It's too funny for words."

"You oughtn't to go tickling young girls, Charlie.

It's not polite, at your age. . . ."

They all cleared out, as it seemed, after midnight; some on all fours, many of them fairly perpendicular. But when the serving lad entered the premises in the sober light of morning, to clear up the debris, he was surprised to perceive a human form reclining under a table. It was the young Norwegian professor. He lay there wide awake, with dishevelled hair and an inspired gleam in his eye, tracing on the floor, with the point of a corkscrew, what looked like a tangle of parallelograms and conic sections. He said it was a map of Trinidad.



Chapter XXXI

As to Miss Wilberforce—she was becoming a real problem.

Once again she had shocked the Faithful. She had misconducted herself by interrupting the torch-light procession with some of those usual or unusual antics, a detailed description of which, while entertaining to a few lost souls, would certainly mortify the majority of decent folks. The cup of endurance was full, overbrimming. Once again she had passed the night in the lock-up. Questioned as to her motives for this particular incident, she artlessly blamed the darkness which misled her, she said, into the regrettable delusion that it was night; "and at night, you know . . ."

This, as Signor Malipizzo observed with his usual legal acumen, might pass for an explanation but nevermore for an excuse. How much longer, he continued, with a fine Ciceronian gesture of eloquent indignation—how much longer would the

foreign colony on Nepenthe endure the presence in their midst of such a disgrace to womanhood?

Thus spake the judge, well aware of what was expected from a man in his position. In his heart he desired nothing less than her departure; he was charmed with her disturbing influence; he hoped she would live a hundred years on the island. In the first place he received occasional gifts in kind from various grocers and wine-merchants who enriched themselves by supplying her at preposterous prices with intoxicants, and who thought by these subtle tactics to retain him as an ally in their cause. Secondly and chiefly, every new scandal of this nature gave him a fresh opportunity of consigning her, temporarily, to the lock-up. Only temporarily. Because Mr. Keith would be sure to bail her out again in the morning, which meant another fifty francs in his pocket.

This is exactly what had just taken place. Mr. Keith had bailed her out, for the thirty-fourth time. She was at liberty once more, sobering down.

Both the Duchess and Madame Steynlin pitied her, as only one woman can pity another. Often they prayed to their respective Gods, Lutheran and High Church, that she might be led to see the error of her ways or, failing that, removed by some happy accident from the island or, failing that, run over by a passing vehicle and injured—injured not dangerously, but merely to such an extent as to necessitate her permanent seclusion from society. Other careless folk were maimed by the furious

driving of the Nepentheans; it was a common form of accident. Miss Wilberforce—the eye-sore, the scandal of her sex—remained intact. Some impish deity seemed to guide her wayward footsteps.

Had she been a person of low extraction there would have been no difficulty in dealing with her. But she was so obviously a lady—she had such obviously rich and influential connections in England! These people, however glad to have her out of the way, might object if violent measures were taken by persons who, after all, had no right to interfere in her affairs. And the situation was rendered none the less complex by the attitude of Miss Wilberforce herself. She was a Tartar. She felt that all men's hands were against her. She used her tongue to good purpose and, at a pinch, her teeth and claws. The policemen of Nepenthe could bear witness to that fact. Drunk, she had a perfectly blistering flow of invective at command. Sober, she was apt to indulge in a dignified bestiality of logic that cut like a knife. It was only in the intermediate stage that she was affable and human. But to catch her in that intermediate stage was extremely difficult. It was of such very brief duration.

They tried to tempt her with the prospect of being repatriated. Strenuously she opposed the notion, on grounds of health. She argued that she had come to the South at the bidding of her English doctor—which was true enough, that grave personage having been urgently pressed by the family to make the suggestion; a return to England, she

declared, would be the death of her. If any attempt were made to interfere with her liberty in this manner, she would appeal to the local Court for protection.

Then the project of sending her to an Inebriates' Home on the mainland was mooted. A sprightly young clergyman, not long resident on Nepenthe, volunteered for the delicate task of persuading the lady to take this step; it would be given out that she was merely undergoing a "rest cure." The sprightly young clergyman started on his mission full of bright expectations. He returned anon, looking prematurely aged. Nobody could get a word out of him at first; he seemed to have become afflicted with a partial paralysis of the tongue. After babbling childishly for an hour or so he fell silent altogether, and it was not till next morning that he recovered full powers of speech. Wild horses, he then announced, would not drag from his lips what had passed at the interview.

As a last resource it was decided to inaugurate a sanatorium on the island for her especial benefit, with a trained nurse permanently in attendance; during her ever-decreasing spells of sobriety the place, together with the nurse, could be utilized for needle-classes and so forth. Money was required. A committee of ladies and gentlemen collected a certain small amount, but their hopes did not rise high till the day when the Duchess broached the subject to her countryman, Mr. van Koppen, after inveigling him into what she called "a friendly

teat-a-teat." Surfeited to bursting-point with his favourite tea-cakes, the millionaire was in a lovely humour. He declared his readiness, then and there, to subscribe half a million francs to the scheme if —if his good friend Mr. Keith would make himself responsible for a similar sum, or even a thousandth part of it.

"Half a million francs—what's that, Duchess, as the price of a smile from yourself? Cheap. Dirt cheap!"

"Another one?" queried the lady.

"Well, just one. I can't swallow any more. But I can still chew."

So fatuously fond was he of this particular variety of condiment that, on their account alone, he would have imported the Duchess and her entire establishment into America. For all that, old Koppen was no fool. Half a million buttered tea-cakes could not impair the lively workings of a brain which had long ago mapped out a swift and sure path to worldly success. He had wind of this project; his answer was carefully prepared. It was a mathematical certainty that not one cent of those half-million francs would ever leave his pocket. For he knew what the Committee did not know—the real character of his friend Keith. Keith was a good fellow but a hopeless crank; Keith was perfectly capable of impoverishing himself in order to keep Miss Wilberforce out of prison. As to subscribing to the schemes of a pack of meddling fools who proposed to intern the dear lady—Keith would see

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them all damned first. This is how Mr. van Koppen, a profound student of human nature, would have argued, had he lacked the opportunity of discussing the question with his good friend. As a matter of fact he had enjoyed that opportunity only a few days ago. He had warned Keith of what was coming, and had found him equally alert to the plans of the Committee and more desirous than himself, if possible, of frustrating them. They had chuckled vastly over a bottle of dry sparkling Nepenthe in anticipation of the event.

"Trust me," said Keith. "I'll talk their heads off."

"I'm glad I shan't be there!" thought the American.

He knew his good friend. Keith could be decidedly fatiguing, especially when dead sober. He had all the Scotchman's passion for dissecting the obvious, discovering new facets in the commonplace, and squeezing the last drop out of a foregone conclusion.

It was a thousand pities that the Duchess, in the exuberance of her triumph, spread abroad the news of the millionaire's promise. For that news had an unfortunate and unexpected result. The Committee, which up till then had consisted of eight reputable members, now swelled, rapidly and mysteriously, to fourteen. Six new gentlemen, including the unspeakable Mr. Hopkins, got themselves enrolled, and all six of them, as was afterwards made manifest, were persons of questionable integrity. By dint of small donations to the fund varying

from five to fifteen francs, they had contrived to have their names put down; it was worth while, they thought, to risk a small sum on the chance of getting a slice out of old Koppen's half-million which could not possibly be used up in the rent or purchase of a three-roomed Sanatorium.

A committee of ladies and gentlemen, formed for charitable purposes, should be like Cæsar's wife. This one had come to resemble the spouse of Claudius. Had the upright and intelligent Mr. Freddy Parker still been its guiding spirit, he would soon have weeded out these undesirable elements and kept the pickings for himself. But Mr. Parker, since his lady's illness, seemed to be withdrawn from all worldly concerns. He had become invisible. And now that the lady was dead he would presumably grow more invisible than ever. It was a severe blow to all concerned; to nobody more than to the Commissioner himself when, on emerging into society from his mourning retirement, he divined what a chance he had missed.

Every single member of the small sub-committee who came, in rather a formal group, to communicate to Mr. Keith the terms of the millionaire's offer and to solicit his participation in the scheme, purposed to attend the funeral of Mr. Parker's lady. It was the right thing to do. That impressive function, already a day overdue, had been irrevocably fixed for 10.30 A. M. at the instance of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Accordingly they reached the Villa Khismet at the matutinal hour of

nine A. M., convinced that the short interval would suffice to cajole out of Mr. Keith a sum sufficient to bind old Koppen to his promise.

It struck them afterwards that this was their flagrant, initial mistake. They ought to have controlled their impatience and waited for a more opportune occasion.

And they would have waited, but for the fact that Mr. Hopkins, a person of dubious motives and antecedents, had insinuated himself into the deputation not without a purpose of his own. This gentleman insisted that delay was fatal. Mr. Keith, he argued, would understand their impatience. The millionaire was sailing in a day or two. One might never get that cheque cashed, or even signed, before he left Nepenthe. And then? Why, then the scheme might fall through and—he added to himself—how was he going to get his share of the plunder?

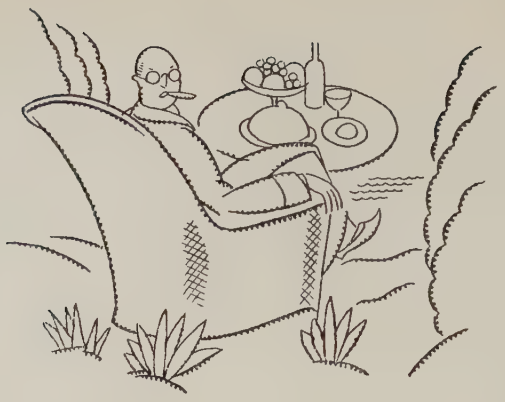
The others, the respectable ones, gave way. Vainly they remonstrated. Vainly they pointed out that old Koppen was not a man to go back on his word; that a cheque could be made out in America as well as anywhere else; that the crux of the question was not the millionaire but his good friend Keith; that they might spoil all their chances by approaching the latter at such an unseasonable hour of the day. It was weak of them.

They ought to have waited. For Keith was fond of solitude at all times, and any one of his dozen gardeners could have told them that, like every

other self-respecting scholar, he was in the habit of breakfasting not earlier than 9.30, and dangerous to approach before that meal. Or they might have made enquiries concerning his mode of life among his fellow-countrymen on Nepenthe. The bibliographer, for instance, would have informed them that Keith was "generally sick about eleven" —meaning, by this playful nonsense, to insinuate that it was not safe to disturb him till after that hour. Be that as it may, he was certainly irritable before breakfast-time on every single day of the year and, as it happened, irritable beyond the common measure on this particular morning, because the downpour of the previous afternoon had dashed to pieces—among other material damage—the tender blooms of certain priceless ipomæas. That alone was enough to infuriate an archangel. Moreover, like everybody else—he always conformed to custom—he had been slightly tipsy overnight. This had the singular effect of making him glum, ceremonious, and ready to take offence.

Here, now, was this pack of officious idiots blundering in upon him. Under ordinary circumstances he would have tried to be polite. As it was, he could hardly bring himself to give them a civil word of welcome. They caught him on his way from the bath to the garden—to a succulent breakfast under his favourite pine-tree within view of the Tyrrhenian; and his own flowered silk dressing-gown and gold-embroidered Turkish slippers contrasted oddly with the solemn vestments, savouring

of naphthaline, which they had donned for the funeral. After the barest of apologies for a costume which, he ventured to think, was as suitable as any other for a gentleman at that hour of the morning, he bade them be seated and listened to what the speaker had to say—blinking ominously the while through his spectacles, like an owl with the sun in its eyes.



Chapter XXXII

It was a long and rambling exposition.

Miss Wilberforce must be protected against herself. They came to him for a contribution, however small, which would enable Mr. van Koppen to fulfil his promise. It was not a question of meddlesomeness. It was a question of putting an end to a crying public scandal. Miss Wilberforce spent her days in sleeping, and her nights in shocking the population of Nepenthe. The lady should be temporarily secluded in her own interests; she was not fit to be left alone; it was an act of charity to do what one could towards improving her health and prolonging her life. They were out for a philanthropic object—to assist in helping a fellow-creature. Miss Wilberforce must be protected against herself. Mr. van Koppen's half-million would enable them to compass this end. His own contribution, however small, would enable Mr. van Koppen to fulfil his promise. Miss Wilberforce

must be protected——

He quite understood, Miss Wilberforce must be protected against herself. And he disagreed heartily. Nobody must be protected against himself. The attitude of a man towards his fellows should be that of non-intervention, of benevolent egotism. Every person of healthy digestion was aware of that cardinal truth. Unfortunately persons of healthy digestions were not as common as they might be. That was why straight thinking, on these and other subjects, was at a discount. Nobody had a right to call himself well-disposed towards society until he had grasped the elementary fact that the only way to improve the universe was to improve oneself, and to leave one's neighbour alone. The best way to begin improving oneself was to keep one's own bowels open, and not trouble about those of anybody else. Turkey rhubarb, in fact. The serenity of outlook thereby attained would enable a man to perceive the futility of interfering with the operation of natural selection.

The speaker, he went on, had dropped the word charity. Had the tribe of Israel cultivated a smattering of respect for physiology or any other useful science instead of fussing about supernatural pedigrees, they would have been more cautious as to their diet. Had they been careful in the matter of dietary, their sacred writings would never have seen the light of day. Those writings, a monument of malnutrition and faulty digestive processes, were responsible for three-quarters of what was called

charity. Charity was responsible for the greater part of human mischief and misery. The revenues of the private charities of London alone exceeded five million sterling annually. What were these revenues expended upon? On keeping alive an incredible number of persons who ought to be dead. What was the result of keeping these people alive? A deterioration of the whole race. Charity consisted in setting a premium on bodily ill-health and mental inefficiency. Charity was an Oriental nightmare; an endeavour to raise the weak to the level of the strong; an incitement to improvidence. Charity disturbed the national equilibrium; it lowered the standard of mankind instead of raising it. Charity was an unmitigated nuisance which had increased, was increasing, and ought to be diminished.

By way of varying the phraseology, but not the thing, they had called themselves philanthropists. The meaning of that venerable word had decayed of late in characteristic fashion. Prometheus, the archetype, brought fire from Heaven to comfort certain people who had the wit to appreciate its uses. He did not waste his time wet-nursing the unfit, like a modern philanthropist. What was a modern philanthropist? He was a fellow who was always bothering you to do something for somebody else. He appealed to your purse for the supposed welfare of some pet degenerate. Prometheus appealed to your intelligence for the real welfare of rational beings. A rich man found it extremely simple, no doubt, to sign a cheque. But an act was

not necessarily sensible because it happened to be simple. People ought to dominate their reflexes. Prometheus did not choose the simplest course—he chose the wisest, and found it a pretty tough job, too. That alone proved him to have been a man of sound digestion and robust health. Had it been otherwise, indeed, he would never have endured that vulture-business for so long.

The deputation exchanged glances, puzzled by this pompous and peevish exordium. It did not promise well; it sounded quite unlike Mr. Keith's usually bland address. Perhaps he had not yet breakfasted. "We ought to have waited," they thought. One of the listeners was so annoyed that he began:

"A paradox, Mr. Keith, is not necessarily sensible, because it happens to be simple"—but was overborne by that gentleman, who proceeded calmly:

"So much for generalities. Now Miss Wilberforce is a lady of independent means and of a certain age. She is not an infant, to be protected against herself or against others; she has reached years of indiscretion. Like a good many sensible persons she lives in this country. Of course a residence here has its drawbacks—very grave drawbacks, some of them. But the drawbacks are counter-balanced by certain advantages. In short, what applies to one country does not always apply to the other. Yet you propose to treat her exactly as if she were living in England. That strikes me as somewhat unreasonable."

"Mr. van Koppen has promised us——"

"He may do what he likes with his money. But I don't see why I should become the pivot for making my good friend do what strikes me as a foolish action. I am too fond of him for that. Mr. van Koppen and myself have many points in common; among other things this feature, that neither of us is of aristocratic birth. I suspect that this is what made you count on me for a subscription. You thought that I, having a little money of my own, might be tempted by certain sycophantic instincts to emulate his misplaced generosity. But I am not a snob. From the social point of view I don't care a tuppenny damn for anyone. On the other hand, my origin has given me something of Dr. Samuel Johnson's respect for what he calls his betters. I like the upper classes, especially when they behave according to their old traditions. That is why I like Miss Wilberforce. She conducts herself, if report be true, with all the shamelessness of a born lady. Born ladies are not so common that we should hide them away in nursing homes. All forceful seclusion is dishonouring. Every little insect, drunk or sober, enjoys its freedom; and if you gentlemen were not philanthropists I would try to point out how gallant your proposal must be, how humiliating to a high-spirited woman, to be placed under lock and key, in charge of some callous attendant. But to what purpose? Turkey rhubarb——"

"I am afraid, Mr. Keith, that we have come at an inopportune moment?"

"It's quite possible. But I won't keep you much longer—you must be dying to attend that funeral! In fact, I would not detain you at all if I did not feel that you expected some kind of explanation from me. What were we saying?"

"Turkey rhubarb."

"Ah, yes! I was trying to be fair-minded which, by the way, is generally a mistake. It struck me that perhaps I over-emphasized its advantages just now. Because, of course, there is something to be said against the use of such drugs. In fact, now I come to think of it, there is a good deal to be said in favour of constipation. It is the cause of our English spleenfulness, and this spleenfulness, properly directed, has its uses. It engenders a certain energetic intolerance of mind. I think the success of our nation is largely due to this particular quality. If I were an historian I would amuse myself with proving that we owe not only Magna Charta, but our whole Empire—Canada, Australia, and all the rest of them—to our costive habits of body. What befits a nation, however, does not always befit a man. To crush, in a fit of chronic biliousness, the resistance of Bengal and add its land to the British Empire, may be a racial virtue. To crush, in a fit of any kind, the resistance of our next door neighbour Mr. Robinson and add his purse to our own, is an individual vice. No! I fail to discover any personal advantage to be gained from excess of bile. The bilious eye sees intensely, no doubt, but in a distorted and narrow fashion; it is incapable of a gener-

ous outlook. Cloudy, unserene! A closing-up, instead of a widening out. The bowels of compassion: what a wonderful old phrase. They ought to be kept open. I look around me, and see extraordinary little goodwill among my fellow-creatures. Here is Miss Wilberforce. What she yearns for is the milk of human kindness—gentle words, gentle dealings, from all of us. Instead of that, every one is ready to cast stones at her. She is treated like a pariah. For my part I do not pass her by; I am not ashamed to consort with sinners, if such they be; I would like, if I could, to make her free and happy instead of imprisoning her in a place of self-reproach. A healthy man is naturally well disposed, not on principle or from any divine inspiration but because his bodily organs are performing their proper functions. His judgment is not warped by the black humours of indigestion. He perceives that natural laws, however harsh they seem, are never so harsh as our amateurish attempts to circumvent them. Modern philanthropy is an attempt of this nature. It is crass emotionalism. Regarded from the point of view of the race, your philanthropy is a disguised form of brutality."

"Mr. Keith!"

"All sentimentalists are criminals."

This perverse balderdash was getting on the nerves of the deputation. It had one good effect, however. They had been afraid, at first, of wasting Mr. Keith's time; now they began to realize that he was wasting theirs.

"Speaking for myself, Mr. Keith, I should say that you are spoiling your case by over-statement, and that these reflections of yours are libels upon a class of men and women who devote their time and money, often their lives, to alleviating the distress of others. However that may be, they are generalities. We came to you about a practical matter, and an urgent one. We want to remove a crying scandal from the island. The habits of Miss Wilberforce, as I think I pointed out, are shocking to all decent folks. I suppose you won't deny that?"

"I remember your using those words. They struck me as remarkable because, for my own part, I have not yet discovered any man, woman, or child who could shock me. Some persons make a profession of being scandalized. I am profoundly distrustful of them. It is the prerogative of vulgarians to be shocked. If I ever felt inclined to blush, it would not be at the crooked behaviour of men, but at their crooked intellectual processes. Whenever a so-called scandal comes my way, I thank God for the opportunity of seeing something new and learning something to my advantage."

"There is nothing very new about the scandalous conduct of Miss Wilberforce, save her unfortunate habit of divesting herself——"

"Please to note that there is a good deal of loose and exaggerated talk going on here. But one thing is quite certain. These exhibitions, supposing they really take place, have never been known to occur until after midnight—with the lamentable excep-

tion of yesterday afternoon, when it was even darker than midnight. If your decent folks are so squeamish, what are they doing in the streets at that unearthly hour? I am asleep then, as they ought to be. This may account for the fact that I have never seen the lady in a state of alcoholic exhilaration. But if I had the good luck to stumble upon her, I would certainly not be shocked."

"And what, may I ask, would you do?"

"My feelings towards the spectacle would depend upon the momentary state of my mind. I might, for example, be in a frolicsome Elizabethan mood. In that case I would appreciate the humour of the situation. If only half of what I hear is true, she must be extremely funny at such moments. I would probably laugh myself into an apoplexy. I wish the English still possessed a shred of the old sense of humour which Puritanism, and dyspepsia, and newspaper reading, and tea-drinking have nearly extinguished. It ought to be revived afresh. Nothing like a good drunkard for that purpose. As a laughter-provoking device it is cheaper and more effective than any pantomime yet invented; and none the worse, surely, for being a little old-fashioned?"

"I must say, Mr. Keith, I don't think God created anybody to be laughed at."

"Maybe He didn't. But a fellow can't help laughing, all the same. On the other hand, I might be in that interfering humanitarian mood which is liable to beset even the wisest of us. I would

then be tempted to lead her homewards gently but firmly, simulating intoxication, if I could bring myself to do it—pretending, you understand, to be in the same state as herself, if I could manage it with any prospect of success—in order to make her feel thoroughly at her ease. I should not dream of ruffling her state of mind by a single word of reproach; the private feelings and self-respect, even of a drunkard, should never be violated. Again, if I were in my ordinary reflective condition, I should doubtless stand aside and muse, as I have often mused, upon the folly of intemperance. Drunkenness—that shameful vice! How many estimable men and women have succumbed to it; men I have known, women I have loved and even respected! This makes me think that we ought to be grateful to have so glaring an example of insobriety before our eyes. We ought to regard Miss Wilberforce, if your account of her be true, as a Divine warning. Warnings are not sent for nothing. And you, gentlemen—you propose to hide away this heaven-sent warning in a sanatorium. That strikes me as flying in the face of Providence."

"Our project would at least secure her from the risk of being run over by some vehicle."

"Pray, why should the dear lady not choose to be run over? Surely she can please herself? It would be an appropriate ending to a brief and merry career. It would be more than this. We spoke, just now, of her example as a deterrent to others. Well, this example, so far as we spectators are concerned,

would lose its point and pungency if she died as you propose—a half-reclaimed inebriate in some home. She must be run over, or otherwise violently destroyed, if we are to have the full benefit of the example. It is only then that we shall be able to say to ourselves: Ah, we always thought it was risky to drink strong waters, but *now we know*."

"A fatal accident of this kind, quite apart from other considerations, would involve her relatives in all kinds of trouble with the legal authorities of this country."

"I am glad you mentioned the legal aspects of the case; I had nearly forgotten them. They are most important. In electing to be crushed under a vehicle she acts on her own initiative. What you propose is nothing less than a curtailment of her liberty of action. How do you think the local authorities would envisage such an arbitrary step? I imagine it may cost you dear to arrogate to yourselves a power which, in this country at least, is vested in the proper authorities. You may well find yourselves in collision with the penal code of Italy which has been framed, and is now administered, by men of uncommonly wide views—men who reverence personal freedom above gold and rubies. I should not be surprised if our magistrate on Nepenthe were to take, on legal grounds, the same view of the case as I take on purely moral ones, namely, that your action towards Miss Wilberforce would amount to an unwarranted persecution. He would regard it, very likely, as the un-

justifiable incarceration of a perfectly harmless individual. Signor Malipizzo, I may say, has pronounced views as to his duties towards society."

This was too much for one of the respectable members of the deputation. He asked:

"Are you referring to that blackguard, that pestilential hog, who calls himself a judge?"

"Perhaps you do not know him as well as I do. I wish you knew him better. I wish you knew him as well as I do! He is worth knowing. Let me tell you something about him—something new and characteristic. Like many natives, he is scrupulously fair-minded and honest. Now I can get on, at a pinch, even with an upright man. That is because I always try to discover the good side of my fellow-creatures. But other people cannot. Accordingly, being an incorruptible magistrate, he is liable to encounter hostility among a certain disreputable section of the populace. His conscientious methods expose him to the accusation of harsh dealing. This has happened more than once. It happened only two days ago, when he sentenced to prison a batch of Russian lunatics who were responsible, among other damage, for the deaths of three innocent school-children. I commend his action. He erred, if at all, on the side of leniency; for we really cannot have a pack of raving wolves at large here. It is different in Russia. You can go mad there—indeed that country, with its vast plains and trackless forests, seems to have been especially created for the purpose of running amuck. But this

island is really too small; there are so many glass windows and babies about—don't you think so, gentlemen?"

"Nepenthe is certainly a small place, Mr. Keith."

"Note, now, how differently he treats Miss Wilberforce, who not only never killed three school-children but has never, to the best of my knowledge, injured a living creature. I am informed on good authority that, after spending a tumultuous night in gaol, she has already regained her liberty. And this, if I am not mistaken, is the second or third occasion at least on which our judge has behaved in a similar manner towards her. Once more I commend his action. Why has Signor Malipizzo set the lady free? Because, unlike a modern philanthropist, he is aware of the wider issues involved; he acts not with the severity of a fanatic, but with the understanding, the tolerance, the mellow sympathy of a man of the world. I said that everyone on Nepenthe treated Miss Wilberforce as a pariah. That was a mistake. I ought to have allowed for one exception—our admirable judge! It strikes me as significant that an official who is bound to her by no ties of blood-relationship or nationality and who enjoys, moreover, a reputation—however undeserved—for harshness, should be the one person on Nepenthe to stretch a point in her favour; the one person who extends to her the hand of friendship, whose heart throbs in sympathy with her sad case. Significant, and not altogether creditable to us, her compatriots. Now who, I wonder, is the friend of

man, the modern Prometheus; you who incarcerate her, or this alien lawyer who sets her free? To be perfectly frank, I find your attitude contrasts unfavourably with his own. You are the rigorists, the harsh ones. He is the humanitarian. Yes, gentlemen! In my humble opinion there is not a shadow of doubt about it. Signor Malipizzo is the true philanthropist. . . ."

The deputation, wending to the market-place rather hurriedly in order to take their places in the funeral cortège, said to themselves:

"We ought to have waited."

Thinking it over as they marched along, the respectable members came to the conclusion that the others, the Hopkins section, were really to blame for the discomfiture of the expedition. It was they who had insisted with specious arguments upon an interview at this unseasonable hour of the morning; as for themselves, they would gladly have waited for a more suitable occasion. In undertones, low but venomous, they commented upon the undue haste of Mr. Hopkins and its probable motives. Later on they understood everything. Then they called him a thief and a rogue, loudly—but not to his face.

Which shows yet again how inadequately causes and effects are appreciated here on earth. The dubious Mr. Hopkins may well have been moved by mercenary considerations. But this fact had nothing to do with the unsatisfactory issue of the affair. In other words, even as the Saint, in the matter of

that volcanic eruption, had previously gotten the praise for what was not his merit, so now this sinner was blamed for what was not his fault. Had the sub-committee waited till the crack of doom, it would have made no difference whatever to the general trend of Mr. Keith's sententious irrelevancies.

Perhaps, if they had caught him in a better humour, he might have had the decency to invite them to luncheon after the funeral.

Even this was problematical.

Chapter XXXIII

The funeral was a roaring success. The display of ecclesiastics and choristers was unusually fine. Torquemada had seen to that part of the business. It was his duty henceforward to cherish the bereaved representative of Nicaragua—a possible convert, at his hand, to the true faith. The Clubmen, headed by the excellent Mr. Richards, wore their gravest faces. Furthermore, in view of the lady's quasi-official position, the authorities of the island were present in full numbers; the militia, too, looked superb in their picturesque uniforms. And so large was the unofficial attendance, so deafening the music, so brilliant the sunshine, so perfect the general arrangements that even the deceased, captious as she was, could hardly (under other circumstances) have avoided expressing her approval of the performance.

There was an adequate display of fictitious grief among her social equals. Madame Steynlin, in par-

ticular, carried it off—to outward appearances—with remarkable success. She looked really quite upset, and her hat, as usual, attracted the attention of all the ladies. Madame Steynlin's hats were proverbial. She was always appearing in new ones of the most costly varieties. And never, by any chance, did they accord with her uncommon and rather ripe style of beauty. Madame Steynlin was too romantic to dress well. She trimmed her heart, and not her garments. A tidy little income, however, enabled her to eke out lack of taste by recklessness of expenditure. This particular hat, it was observed, must have cost a fortune. And yet it was a perfect fright; it made her look fifteen years older, to the delight of all the other women.

What cared Madame Steynlin about hats? Her distressful appearance was not feigned; she was truly upset, though not about the death of the Commissioner's lady. With an effort whose violence nobody but herself could appreciate, she had managed to extricate herself from the lion-like embraces of Peter the Great—to what purpose? To perform an odious social duty; to waste a fair morning in simulating grief for the death of a woman whom she loathed like poison. Nobody would ever understand what a trial in altruism it had been. Nobody, in fact, ever gave her credit for a grain of self-abnegation. And yet she was always trying to please people—denying herself this and that. How harshly the world judged!

She was also troubled in mind, though in a lesser

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degree, about the fate of the remainder of the Russian colony. Were they not all her brothers and sisters—these laughing, round-cheeked primitives? The magistrate, that caricature of a man, that vindictive and corrupt atheist, that tiger in human form, was doubtless thirsting for the blood of those still at liberty on Nepenthe. How much longer would Peter escape his malice? The dear boy! Her lambkin, her little soul—she had learnt to babble a few words of Russian—her playful, harmless, ever-hungry Peter! On this lovely island, where all men should be at peace—how harshly they dealt with one another!

The rest of the foreign colony, undisturbed by such bitter personal reflections, appeared to bear the loss of the lady with praiseworthy equanimity. They were, in truth, considerably relieved in mind. Death is the great equalizer. In his pale presence they forgot their old squabbles and jealousies; they forgot their numberless and legitimate complaints against this woman. All honoured the defunct who had now lost, presumably for ever, the capacity of mischief-making.

There was undisguised sorrow among the tradespeople and Residency servants. They flocked to the procession in crowds, desiring by this last mark of respect to attract the benevolent notice of the Commissioner and to be remembered in the event of some future settling-up of accounts. To their tear-stained eyes, it looked as if this happy event were receding further and further away into the

dim distance. Hoping against hope, they mourned sincerely. And none wept more convincingly than the little maid Enrichetta, an orphan of tender years whom the lady had taken into her service as an act of charity and forthwith set to work like a galley-slave. The child was convulsed with sobs. She foresaw, with the intuition of despair, that instead of being paid her miserable wages for the last five months she would have to content herself with a couple of her deceased mistress's skirts, thirty-eight inches too wide round the waist.

There were wreaths—abundance of wreaths. Noticeable among them was an enormous floral tribute from the owner of the *Flutterby*. It attracted the most favourable comment. People said that nobody but a multi-multi-multi-millionaire could afford to forgive an affront like that affair of the *crêpe de Chine*. As a matter of fact, old Koppen would have been the last person on earth to forgive an injury of this particular kind. He was a good American; he never permitted loose talk about women, least of all if they were in any way connected with himself; he would get purple in the face, he would ramp and rage and hop about like a veritable Sioux, in the face of any suggestion of improprieties on board his yacht. No, Cornelius van Koppen had acted in all innocence, from natural kindliness of heart. The legend had never reached his ears, nobody (for a wonder) having dared to mention it to him.

Another wreath, from Count Caloveglia—an

uncommonly pretty one, with a simple but heart-felt inscription—created legitimate surprise. Those white camellias, people reckoned, could not have cost less than twenty francs, and everybody knew that the dear old boy was as poor as a church mouse and that, moreover, he had enjoyed nothing but a bowing acquaintance with the deceased lady. He had indeed only spoken to her once in his life. But her face—her face had left an indelible impression on his sensitive and artistic mind.

There was something Greek about Count Caloveglia. His pedigree, uncontaminated by Moor or Spaniard, went back to hoariest antiquity. Many people said he was a reincarnation of old Hellas. Elbowing his way through crowded cities or chatting with sunburnt peasant-lads among the vineyards, he received thrills of pleasurable inspiration—thrills to which grosser natures are inaccessible. He loved to watch the bodily movements of his fellow-creatures and all the eloquent gestures of southern life—the lingering smile, the sullen stare of anger, the firm or flaccid step. Within this world of humdrum happenings he created a world of his own, a sculptor's paradise. Colour said little to him. He was enamoured of form, the lively passion of the flesh, the tremulous play of nerve and muscle. A connoisseur of pose and expression, he looked at mankind from the plastic point of view, peering through accidentals into what was spiritual, preordained, inevitable; striving to interpret—to waylay and hold fast—that divinity, fair or foul, which

resides within one and all of us. How would this one look, divested of ephemeral appurtenances and standing there, in bronze or marble; what were the essential qualities of those features—their æsthetic mission to men like himself; to what type or relic of the classic age might they be assimilated? He was for ever disentangling the eternal from mundane accessories. And there was an element of the eternal, he used to declare, in every creature of earth.

His was an enviable life. He dwelt among masterpieces. They were his beacons, his comrades, his realities. As for other things—the social accidents of time and place, his cares and his poverty—he wore them lightly; they sat upon his shoulders with easy grace, like his own threadbare coat. When he walked among men he could not help contriving imaginary statuary in his head, historical portraits or legendary groups; the faces and attitudes of those he encountered—each one found a place in the teeming realm of his creative phantasy, each one beckoned to him, from afar, as a joyous and necessary revelation.

An enviable life; and never more enviable than on the occasion when he was introduced, at some absurd tea-party, to the lady known as the Commissioner's step-sister. That face! It took possession of him. It haunted his artistic dreamings from the same day onwards. He had always cherished ambitious designs—none more ambitious than a certain piece of work conceived in the bold Pergamese

manner, a noble cluster of women to be entitled "The Eumenides." . . . Her face! That wonderful face proclaimed itself the keynote of the group. If he lived a thousand years he would never behold its like again. What would he not have given to model the lady, then and there!

But modelling was out of the question for the present. It must never be known that he was still capable of such an effort; it might spoil all his chances for the business in hand. He must continue to pose as heretofore for a harmless antiquarian, a dreamer. Nobody, save old Andrea the servant, must know the secret of his life. Yet he was not without hopes of being able to reveal himself ere long in his true character of creator. The day was perhaps not far distant when a pecuniary transaction between himself and his respected American friend, Mr. van Koppen, would ease the burdensome poverty of his life. Then—then he would return to the golden projects of his youth; to the "Eumenides," first of all. Light-hearted with bright expectancy, he saw the financial deal well-nigh concluded; the cheque might be in his pocket within a week; and now already he saw himself in imagination, donning his faded frock-coat and wending his way down to the Residency to lay the foundations of his heart's desire. He would broach the subject with that insinuating southern graciousness which was part and parcel of his nature; the lady's vanity could be trusted to do the rest. He knew of old that no woman, however chaste and

winsome, can resist the temptation of sitting as model to a genuine Count—and such a handsome old Count, into the bargain.

And now suddenly she had died—died, it might be, only a few days too soon. That face, the peerless face, was lost for ever to the world of art—his ideal snatched away by the relentless hand of fate. He mourned as only a sculptor can mourn. Thus it came about that something stronger than himself impelled him to manifest his grief. Despite Andrea's respectful but insistent remonstrances as to the appalling outlay, the wreath of camellias was ordered, and dispatched. An artist's tribute. . . .

It created both surprise and a most excellent impression. What a gentleman he was! Always doing the right thing. How splendid of him. So they reasoned, though the wiser ones added that if he had known the deceased lady a little better he might have hit upon a more sensible way of spending his money.

The fact that there was a good deal of social gossip like this, that appointments for picnics and other functions were being made, would go alone to prove the advantages of a funeral of this kind, quite apart from the universal relief experienced when the coffin was lowered into the earth, and bystanders realized that the lady was at last definitely transferred into Abraham's bosom.

Chapter XXXIV

All Nepenthe had stood by the side of the grave —all, save only Mr. Keith. He remained at home. And this was rather odd, for it is the right thing to attend people's funerals, and Mr. Keith prided himself upon always doing the right thing. It was his boast to pass for a typical Anglo-Saxon, the finest race on earth, when all is said and done; and he used to point out that you could not be a typical Anglo-Saxon unless you respected yourself, and you could not respect yourself unless you respected simultaneously your neighbours and their habits, however perverse they might sometimes appear. Now a funeral, being unavoidable, cannot by any prestidigitations of logic be called perverse. All the more reason for being present. But for a strange twist or kink in his nature, therefore, he would have been on the spot. He would have turned up in the marketplace to the minute, since he prided himself likewise upon his love of punctuality, declaring

that it was one of the many virtues he possessed in common with Her Majesty Queen Victoria.

He disliked funerals. For all his open mind and open bowels, Mr. Keith displayed an unreasoning hatred of death and, what was still more remarkable, not the least shame in confessing it.

"The next interment I propose to attend," he would say, "will be my own. May it be far off! No; I don't care about funerals and the suggestion they convey. A cowardly attitude? I think not. The coward refuses to face a fact. Death is a fact. I have often faced him. He is not a pretty fellow. Most men only give him a shy glance out of the corner of their eye. It scares them out of their wits and makes them say all sorts of snobbishly respectful things about him. Sheer flummery! It is with Death as it is with God—we call them good because we are afraid of what they can do to us. That accounts for our politeness. Death, universal and inevitable, is none the less a villainous institution. Every other antagonist can be ignored or bribed or circumvented or crushed outright. But here is a damnable spectre who knocks at the door and does not wait to hear you say 'Come in.' Hateful! If other people think differently it is because they live differently. How do they live? Like a cow that has stumbled into a dark hole, and now spends its time wondering how it managed to get such a sore behind. Such persons may well be gladdened by the approach of death. It is the best thing they can do—to depart from a world which

they call a dark hole, a world which was obviously not made for them, seeing that they are always feeling uncomfortable about one thing or another. Good riddance to them and their moral stomach-aches."

Mr. Keith professed never to feel uncomfortable. Oh, no! He had no moral stomach-aches. Unlike other folks, he "reacted to external stimuli in appropriate fashion," he cultivated the "function of the real," he always knew how to "dominate his reflexes." His neural currents were "duly co-ordinated." Mr. Keith was in love with life. It dealt fairly with him. It made him loth to bid farewell to this gracious earth and the blue sky overhead, to his cooks and his books, his gardeners and roses and flaming cannas; loth to exchange these things of love, these tangible delights, for a hideous and everlasting annihilation.

That was why, having got rid of the committee of exasperating buffoons, he was now prolonging breakfast far beyond the usual hour. The meal was over at last; and still he felt disinclined to move. Those people had disquieted his composure with their mephitic rant about philanthropy; they had almost succeeded in spoiling his morning. And now this funeral! Would he go into the house and do some reading or write a few letters? No. He could not write letters just then. He was not feeling sufficiently Rabelaisian. Epicurus was his God for the moment. In a mood of heathen wistfulness he lit a cigar and leaned back in the chair, trying to

recapture his serenity.

It was his favourite corner of the domain—a kind of projecting spur or platform shaded by a few grandiose umbrella pines. Near at hand, on a slightly lower level, rose a group of flame-like cypresses whose shapely outlines stood out against the sea, shining far below like a lake of pearl. The milky sheen of morning, soon to be dispelled by the breeze, still hung about the water and distant continent—it trembled upon the horizon in bands of translucent opal. His eye roved round the undulating garden, full of sunlight and flowers and buzzing insects. From a verbena hard by came the liquid song of a blackcap. It gave him pleasure; he encouraged the blackcaps, delighting in their music and because they destroyed the spiders whose troublesome webs were apt to come in contact with his spectacles. The gardeners had severest instructions not to approach their nests. It was one of the minor griefs of his life that, being so short-sighted, he could never discover a bird's nest; no, not even as a child. Memories of boyhood began to flit through his mind; they curled upwards in the scented wreaths of his Havana. . . .

The golden oriole's flute-like whistle poured down from some leafy summit in a sudden stream of melody. A hurried note, he thought; expressed without much feeling—from duty rather than inclination; not like the full-throated ease of other orioles in other lands he knew. His orioles and bee-eaters were invariably in a hurry. And so were the

nightingales. They profited by his hospitality for a day or two and then, uttering a perfunctory little tune, some breathless and insincere word of thanks—just like any human visitor—betook themselves elsewhere, northwards.

Northwards!

He glanced into the mazy foliage of the pine tree overhead, out of which a shower of aromatic fragrance was descending to mingle with the harsher perfume of the cypress. How they changed their faces, the conifers—so fervent and friendly at this hour, so forbidding at night-time! Rifts of blue sky now gleamed through its network of branches; drenched in the sunny rays, the tree seemed to shudder and crackle with warmth. He listened. There was silence among those coralline articulations. Soon it would be broken. Soon the cicada would strike up its note in the labyrinth of needles —annual signal for his own departure from Nepenthe. He always waited for the first cicada.

Northwards!

To his little place in the Highlands, at first. The meagre soil and parsimonious culture, the reasonable discourse of the people, their wholesome disputatiousness, acted as a kind of purge or tonic after all this southern exuberance. Scotland chastened him; its rocks and tawny glinting waters and bleak purple uplands rectified his perspective. He called to mind the sensuous melancholy of the birches, the foxgloves, the hedgerows smothered in dog-roses; he remembered the nights, full of fairy-like

suggestion and odours of earth and budding leaves —those wonderful nights with their silvery radiance, calm and benignant, streaming upwards from the luminous North.

Then, after strolling aimlessly elsewhere, on sea or land, visiting friends—no matter whom or where —he would return to Nepenthe to indulge his genius to the full in the vintage bacchanals. He owned a small plantation that lay high up, among the easterly cliffs of the island. It produced that mountain wine which was held to be the best on Nepenthe. The vines grew upon a natural platform, surrounded by rugged lava crags that overhung the sea.

Hither he was wont to repair with certain of his domestic staff and three or four friends from out of his "inner circle," to superintend the pressing of the grapes. There was a rude structure of masonry on the spot—a vaulted chamber containing winepress and vats and hoes and other implements of the husbandman's time-honoured craft; a few chairs and a table completed the furniture. Nobody knew exactly what happened up here. People talked of wild and shameless carousals; the rocks were said to resound with ribald laughter while Mr. Keith, oozing paganism at every pore, danced faun-like measures to the sound of rustic flutes. Certain it was that the party often got riotously tipsy.

So tipsy that sometimes their host was unable to be moved down to his villa. On such days he was put to bed on the floor between two wine barrels, and the chef hastily advised to come up

with some food and a portable kitchen range. In earliest morning he would insist upon tottering forth to watch the sun as it rose behind the peaks of the distant mainland, flooding the sea with golden radiance and causing the precipices to glitter like burnished bronze. He loved the sunrise—he saw it so seldom. Then breakfast; a rather simple breakfast by way of a change. It was on one of these occasions that the chef made a mistake which his master was slow to forgive. He prepared for that critical meal a dish of poached eggs, the sight of which threw Mr. Keith into an incomprehensible fit of rage.

"Take those damned things away, quickly!" he commanded. It was the celebrated artist's one and only *lâche*.

As a rule, however, he did not sleep on the spot. Peasants, climbing to their work on the hillsides in the twilit hour of dawn, were wont to encounter that staggering procession headed by Mr. Keith who, with spectacles all awry and crooning softly to himself, was carried round the more perilous turnings by a contingent of his devoted retainers.

He found it pleasant to live like this. And now another spring was nearing to its end. For how many more years, he wondered. . . . That confounded funeral. . . .

There was a rustle at his back. The southerly breeze had struck Nepenthe on its morning ripple over the Tyrrhenian, setting things astir; it searched a passage through those mighty canes

which sprouted in a dank hollow where the rains of winter commingled their waters. The leaves grew vocal with a sound like the splash of a rivulet. Often had he listened joyfully to that melody which compensated, in some small degree, for the lack of the old Duke's twenty-four fountains. Legendary music! Now it made him sad. What was its burden? *Midas has asses' ears.* Midas, the fabled king, whose touch turned everything to gold. And gold, and jewels—of what avail were these against the spectre?

The gardeners, moving with bare feet among the sinuous paths, were quick to perceive that a cloud had fallen upon his spirit. They divined his moods with the tactfulness of natural sympathy. On some horticultural pretext one of them drew near and craftily engaged his thoughts and conversation. At last he said something that made him smile. One or two more appeared upon the scene, as if by accident. It was evident that the master needed cheering up. They began to tell him the fairy-tales he loved; tales of robbers and witches and pirates—grand old tales that never wearied him. To arouse his interest they joked among themselves, as though unaware of his existence. One of them, and then another, sang some wild song of love and war which he had picked up while wandering with his flocks among the craggy hills of yonder mainland. He was laughing now; outdoing their songs and stories. It kept him young—to unbend, to play the fool in company such as theirs and relax the fibres stiffened by conventionality; it refreshed him

to exchange the ephemeral for the eternal, the tomfoolery of social life for Theocritus and his deathless creatures. How fair it was, this smiling earth! How blithely the young voices went aloft!

They failed to drown those other strains, vagrant wraiths that now floated upwards over fields and houses on the tepid wings of the sirocco—fragmentary snatches, torn from the brazen measure of the municipal band as it marched with the funeral procession. He cursed the sounds from the bottom of his heart. They reminded him of that infamous apparition, of all he most ardently desired to forget. His laughter died down. Wanly he looked at his mirthful pagans, the embodiment of joy. Yes; these were his distraction, his playmates, his elixir of life, his antidote against the only disease, the only sin, crime, vice which he recognized on earth—a vice none the less, because it happened to be the inevitable—the vice of old age. And all the time that pallid swarm came crowding on: messengers from the inexorable spectre. He felt them creeping about with ghostly tread, blighting the radiance of his life, tainting the very air he breathed. Hateful intruders! They wailed among his lilies. The garden was full of their horrid footsteps.

In their presence Mr. Keith began to experience an uncomfortable sensation, a kind of chill—as though something evil had stepped between himself and the brave light of the sun. It was a feeling which he would have diagnosed, in other people, as perilously akin to a moral stomach-ache.

Chapter XXXV

Only one other person on Nepenthe found cause to complain of the municipal music. It was Mr. Heard. Altogether, he was not greatly edified by this, the first funeral of its kind he had ever witnessed. A rowdy-dowdy business, he called it. The music was too lively and blatant for so solemn an occasion; the gorgeous vestments of the clergy, the loud chattering among the mourners, the violent gestures that accompanied Torquemada's well-meant and carefully prepared oration (Don Francesco, a born speaker, would have done it better, but the defunct was no friend or even client of his)—all these things savoured slightly of irreverence. Everyone was talking and laughing as they marched along. It was more like a polonaise than a funeral. In his African period the sight of such a burial would have affected him unpleasantly. But Mr. Heard was changing, widening out.

"These people live gaily," he said to himself.

"Why not? A funeral is supposed to be nothing but a friendly leave-taking. Why not be cheerful about it? We are all going to see each other again, sometime, somewhere, I suppose. . . ."

The problem gave him no trouble whatever.

He found himself walking side by side with Mr. Eames who ventured to remark, in a seemly whisper, that he attended the funeral not so much out of respect for the lamented lady—every cloud, he fancied, had a silver lining—as because he hoped to gather, from among so representative a concourse of natives and foreigners, the "popular impression" of yesterday's eruption, with a view to utilizing it in his appendix on *Recent Volcanic Phenomena of Nepenthe.*

"Really?" replied the bishop. "A chapter on Volcanic Phenomena? It is sure to be interesting."

Mr. Eames warmed to his subject.

It might be made interesting, he agreed, but for his own ignorance of geology. As it was, the business gave him a vast deal of trouble. Monsignor Perrelli had dealt with geological matters in a fashion far too summary for present-day requirements. The old scholar was not to blame, of course, seeing that geology was quite a modern science; but he might at least have been a little more painstaking in his record of those showers of ashes and lapilli which were known to have covered the island from time to time. His account of them was lamentably defective. It was literally bristling with—with—with lacunæ, which had to be filled up by

means of laborious references to contemporary chronicles. Altogether one of the most unsatisfactory sections of an otherwise admirable work. . . .

"I wish I could help you," said Mr. Heard.

"I wish you could. I wish anyone could. There was that young Jew, Marten, who understood more about these things than most people. A coarse little fellow, but quite a specialist. He promised to supply me with an up-to-date statement, accompanied by a map of the geological structure of the island. I said to myself: Just what I wanted! Well, this confounded statement has never reached my hands. Now I hear he has left the place. Gone away altogether. Didn't have the decency to say good-bye or leave his address. Too bad. Who knows when the next mineralogist will turn up? These fellows are not as common as blackbirds. Meanwhile I have to rely on my own efforts. It's wonderful, by the way, how much a person can pick up of odds and ends of information when forced, by a hobby of this kind, to delve into recondite departments of knowledge which he would otherwise not have dreamt of exploring. One grows quite encyclopædic! Minerals, medicine, strategy, heraldry, navigation, palæography, statistics, politics, botany—what did I know or care about all these things before I stumbled on old Perrelli? Have you ever tried to annotate a classic, Mr. Heard? I assure you it opens up new vistas, new realms of delight. It gives one a genuine zest in life. Enthralling!"

And thereupon the bibliographer fell silent, all at once. He had succumbed, yet again, to his besetting sin: talking too enthusiastically to outsiders of what was nearest his heart. Why on earth should a globe-trotting bishop be bothered about the mineralogy of Nepenthe? It was absurd: tactless of him.

He tried to atone for the blunder by some mundane trivialities.

"What are you doing afterwards?"

"Going up to see Mrs. Meadows."

"Are you? Do remember me very kindly! Or perhaps—no. Better not. Fact is, she cut me dead two days ago. At least, it looked uncommonly like it. I confess I was rather upset, because I'm not conscious of having done anything to annoy her. Indeed, I've always felt a kind of weakness for Mrs. Meadows; there is something so fine and womanly about her. Will you try to find out what it's all about? Thanks. Perhaps she may not have noticed me. She was walking very fast. And I must say she was not looking herself at all. Not at all. White and scared. Looked as if she had seen a ghost."

The bishop was troubled by these words.

"Is that so?" he asked. "You alarm me. I think I'll be off this minute. She is my cousin, you know; and I've been rather concerned about her lately. Yes; I won't wait for the end of this funeral; I'll be off! Perhaps we shall meet this evening. Then I can tell you her news. As to deliberately cutting you—don't you believe that for a minute."

"I shall be down here about seven o'clock. . . ."

"People like her," thought Mr. Heard, as he fell out of the procession. He would make a point of having a good long chat, and perhaps stay to luncheon.

He dreaded the coming heat of midday. It was quite warm enough already, as he climbed slowly upward by the short cuts that intersected the driving road, availing himself of every little patch of shade that fell from trees or cottages athwart the pathway.

The country seemed deserted, the funeral ceremony having attracted all the natives from far and near. Yet one figure was moving rapidly up the road in front of him. Muhlen! Even at this distance he was recognizable; he looked, as usual, overdressed. What was he doing there, at this hour? Mr. Heard remembered seeing him go up, once before, at the same time of the day.

He called to mind what he had heard from Keith in the boat. He was quite prepared to believe that this man lived on blackmail and women; that was precisely what he looked like. A villainous personality, masquerading under an assumed name. The sight of the fellow annoyed him. What business had he to transact up there? Retlow! Once more he began to puzzle where he had heard that name. It conjured up, dimly, some unpleasant connotation. Where? Long ago; so much was clear. For a brief moment he felt on the verge of remembering. Then his mind became blank as before;

the revelation had slipped away, past recall.

He was glad to enter the shady garden of the villa Mon Repos. Old Caterina sat, sphinx-like, on the stones at the house entrance. There was some knitting-work on her lap, with brown wool and curiously shaped needles; one foot rested on the base of the cradle, which she rocked from time to time. At his approach she rose up, stark and hieratic, without a trace of a friendly smile on her countenance. Was the lady indoors? No, she was out. Out! Where? There was a definite but enigmatical movement of her withered brown arm; it appeared to embrace the universe. And when would she be back? No reply whatever. Only a slight upward movement of the eyes, as much as to say: God knows!

"I'll wait," thought Mr. Heard.

He walked past the forbidding hag who seemed to exhale a positive hostility towards him, and entered his cousin's sitting-room. He would wait. He waited. He glanced through a pile of illustrated newspapers that lay about. And still he waited. The room looked different somehow; almost untidy. There were no roses about. An hour passed. And still no sign of his cousin.

Out. Always out. What could this mean? Where could she be? It was all rather mysterious and unsatisfactory.

At last he took out his watch. Ten minutes to one! No use, waiting any longer. He scribbled a hasty note, left it on the writing-table, and walked

into the garden past the impenetrable Caterina, who barely deigned to glance up from her knitting. He would look for a carriage, and give himself the luxury of a drive down. It was too hot to walk at that hour.

Strolling along he espied a familiar courtyard that gave upon the street; Count Caloveglia's place. On an impulse he entered the massive portal which stood invitingly ajar. Two elderly gentlemen sat discoursing in the shade of the fig tree; there was no difficulty in recognizing the stranger as Mr. van Koppen, the American millionaire, a frequent visitor, they said, of Count Caloveglia.

A bronze statuette, green with age, stood on a pedestal before them.

"How kind of you to come and see me!" said the Italian. "Pray make yourself as comfortable as you can, though these chairs, I fear, are not of the latest design. You are going to do me the honour, are you not, of sharing my simple luncheon? Mr. van Koppen is staying too."

"Very good of you!"

"Delighted to make your acquaintance," said the millionaire. "Keith was talking about you only yesterday—such nice things! Do stay. Count Caloveglia has been touching on most interesting subjects—I would come from the other end of the world to listen to him."

The Count, manifestly shy of these praises, interrupted by asking:

"What do you think of that bronze, Mr. Heard?"

It was an exquisite little thing.

Perfect to the finger-tips and glowing in a lustrous patina of golden-green, the Locri Faun—so-called from the place of its discovery—was declared to be stamped with that hall-mark of individual distinction which the artificers of old Hellas contrived to impress upon every one of the rare surviving bronzes of its period. It was perhaps the finest of the whole group. No wonder the statue had created wild excitement among the few, the very few, discreet amateurs who had been permitted to inspect the relic prior to its clandestine departure from the country. And much as they might deplore the fact that it was probably going to adorn the museum of Mr. Cornelius van Koppen, an alien millionaire, not one of them found it in his heart to disapprove Count Caloveglia's action. For they all liked him. Everyone liked him. They all understood his position. He was a necessitous widower with a marriageable daughter on his hands, a girl whom everybody admired for her beauty and charm of character.

Mr. van Koppen, like all the rest, knew what hard times he had gone through; how, born of an ancient and wealthy family, he had not hesitated to sell his wonderful collection of antiques together with all but a shred of his ancestral estates, in order to redeem the gambling debts of a brother. That amounted to quixotism, they declared. They little realized what anguish of mind this step had cost him, for he concealed his true feelings under a cloak

of playful worldliness. Excess of grief, he held, is an unlovely thing—not meet to be displayed before men. All excess is unlovely. That was Count Caloveglia's classic point of view. Measure! Measure in everything.

People revered him, above all else, for his knowledge in matters of art. His connoisseurship was not one of mere learning; it was intuitional. Astonishing tales were told of him. By the sense of touch alone, and in the dark, he could appraise correctly any piece of plastic work you liked. He had a natural affinity with such things. They held it quite likely that the blood of Praxiteles or his compeers may still have flowed through his veins —certain, at all events, that there hung about his person the traditions of the versatile colonists on the shores of Magna Græcia who, freed by legions of slaves from the trivial vexations which beset modern lives, were able to create in their golden leisure those monuments of beauty which are the envy and despair of our generation. On all that concerned the history and technique of ancient bronzes, more especially, he was *facile princeps* in the land, and it was hinted, after the sale of his property, that Count Caloveglia would not be slow to retrieve the fortunes of his family by putting into exercise those talents for metal-working of which, as a gifted boy, he had already shown himself to be possessed.

In this they were disappointed. He spoke of these things as "sins of his youth," professing an invinci-

ble distaste, in these later years, for the drudgery of work. He called himself an old dreamer. There was a shed, it is true, attached to the house, a shed which went by the name of a studio. All visitors were taken to see this atelier. It was smothered in dust and cobwebs. Clearly, as the Count himself would explain with a honeyed smile, it had not been in use for twenty years or more.

Mr. van Koppen knew all this.

He knew about that strip of land which the old man had reserved for himself at the sale of his ancestral domain. It lay among the hills, some twenty or thirty miles above the classic site of Locri. On this spot, people were given to understand, fragments of old marbles and vases had been picked up by the peasantry within the last years. Things of small worth—pottery mostly; they lay about Count Caloveglia's Nepenthe courtyard and were given by him, as keepsakes, to any visitor who showed an interest in them. He attached no value to these trifles.

"From my little place on the hills," he would say. "Pray take it as a memento of the pleasure which your visit has given me! Oh, it is quite a small property, you know; just a few acres, with a meagre soil; in good years it produces a little oil and a barrel or two of wine. And that is all. I only kept back this morsel from the general ruin of my property—well, for sentimental reasons. One likes to feel that one is still tied—by a slender thread, it is true—to the land of one's ancestors. There is

certainly no wealth to be obtained above ground. But it is quite possible that something might emerge from below, given the energy and the means to make systematic excavations. The whole country is so rich in remains of Hellenic life! The countrymen, ploughing my few fields, often stumble upon some odd trifle of this kind. There was that Demeter you may have heard about; sadly mutilated, alas!"

Before the discovery of the Locri Faun on this site the only find of any value had been a battered head—a Demeter, presumably. It was sold to a Paris collector for a few thousand francs, and had thereafter attracted no further attention. It was not worth talking about.

Now, when this dazzling Faun came to light and Mr. van Koppen announced his intention of purchasing the masterpiece for his collection, his art-expert, Sir Herbert Street—the eminent connoisseur whom he had filched from the South Kensington Museum with the bribe of a Cabinet Minister's salary—thought it his duty to compare the disfigured Demeter with this new and marvellous thing. Sir Herbert Street was an inordinately vain man, but conscientious at the same time and, in matters of art-criticism, sufficiently reliable. Not every art-expert would have done what he did. In the interests of his employer he took the trouble of journeying to Paris and carefully examining the poor Demeter fragment. Then, viewing the Locri Faun at Nepenthe in the presence of Count Calo-

veglia, he made rather a subtle remark.

"Does it not strike you, Count, that there is a curious, an evasive kind of resemblance between this Faun and the Demeter?"

The old man beamed with joy at these words.

"My dear Sir Herbert, allow me to congratulate you on your keen artistic perception! I believe you are the only person, besides myself, who has hitherto been struck by those definite but undefinable traits of similarity. Mr. van Koppen may well be proud of your penetration——"

"Thank you," said the other, immensely flattered. "That is what I am paid for, you know. But now, how do you account for the likeness?"

"I will tell you my own hypothesis. I hold, to be brief, that they both came from the same workshop."

"The same workshop! You amaze me."

"Yes, or at all events from the same school of craftsmen, or some common fountain of inspiration. We know lamentably little of the art history of even a great centre like Locri, but, judging by the hints of Pindar and Demosthenes, I think there may well have been—there must have been—consummate local masters, now forgotten, who propagated certain methods of work, certain fashions in form and feeling and treatment which ended, naturally enough, in a kind of fixed tradition. This would suffice to explain the resemblance which your sagacity has enabled you to detect between these two pieces. That is what I mean by saying

that they came from the same workshop. What do you think of my theory?"

"I think it accounts for the fact in a most satisfactory manner," the expert had replied, thoroughly convinced.

Mr. van Koppen knew all this.

But he only believed half of it. . . .

"You were saying, Count?"

The Italian shifted his glance from the dainty outlines of the Locri Faun and smiled upon his interlocutor and then upon Mr. Heard, who had at last taken a seat, after walking approvingly round and round the statuette.

"I was going to tell you of another point which occurred later on to Sir Herbert; a man, by the way, of unusual acumen. We agreed that Locri was the indubitable place of origin both of the Demeter and of the Faun. Well, said he, granting this—how came they to be unearthed up in the hills, on your property, twenty-five miles away? I confess I was at first nonplussed by this question. For, to the best of my knowledge, there are no indications of any large Hellenic settlement up there. But it struck me that there may well have been a villa or two—indeed, there must have been, to judge by the miscellaneous ancient material found on my little place. This is what makes me think that these two relics were deliberately carried there."

"Carried?"

"Carried. For although the summer season at Locri was undoubtedly more endurable then than

it now is, yet the town must have been sufficiently hot in the dog-days; whereas my vineyard is situated among the cool uplands——"

"A kind of climatic station, you mean?"

"Precisely. Don't you think that richer people had domiciles in both places? The ancients, you know, were so sensitive in the matter of temperatures that in summer time they travelled only by night and some of their toughest generals had underground chambers built for them during their campaigns. I can imagine, for instance, some young and ardent lover of art, in the days when Pythagoras taught under those glittering colonnades of Croton, when the fleets of Metapontum swept the blue Ionian, and Sybaris taught the world how to live a life of ease—I can almost see this youth," he pursued enthusiastically, "flitting from a hot palace on the plain towards those breezy heights and, inflamed with an all-absorbing passion for the beautiful, carrying up with him one or two, just one or two, of those beloved bronzes from which he could not, and would not, be parted—no, not even for a short summer month—to be a joy to his eyes and an inspiration to his soul among the mountain solitudes. These men, I take it, had a sense in which we, their descendants, are wholly deficient—the sense of the solace, of the pleasurable companionship, to be derived from works of art. That sense has been destroyed. The Japanese alone, of all moderns, still foster an ingenuous affection which prompts them to cling closely to these things of beauty, to press

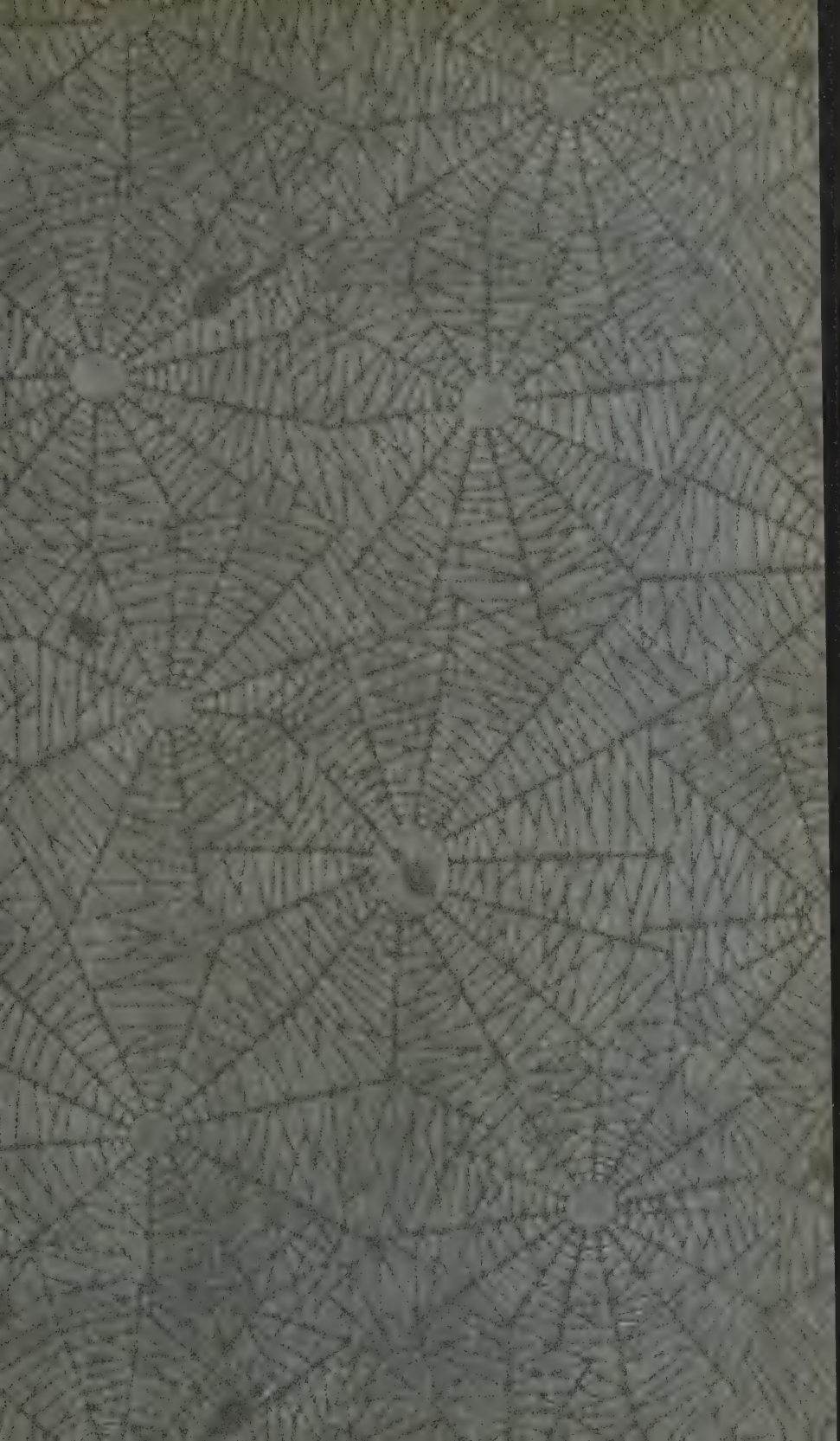
them to their hearts as loving friends; the rest of us, surrounded by a world of sordid ugliness, have become positively afraid of their fair but reproachful shapes. Ah, Mr. van Koppen, that was the age of true refinement, the age of gold! Nowadays—nowadays we only carry our troubles about with us."

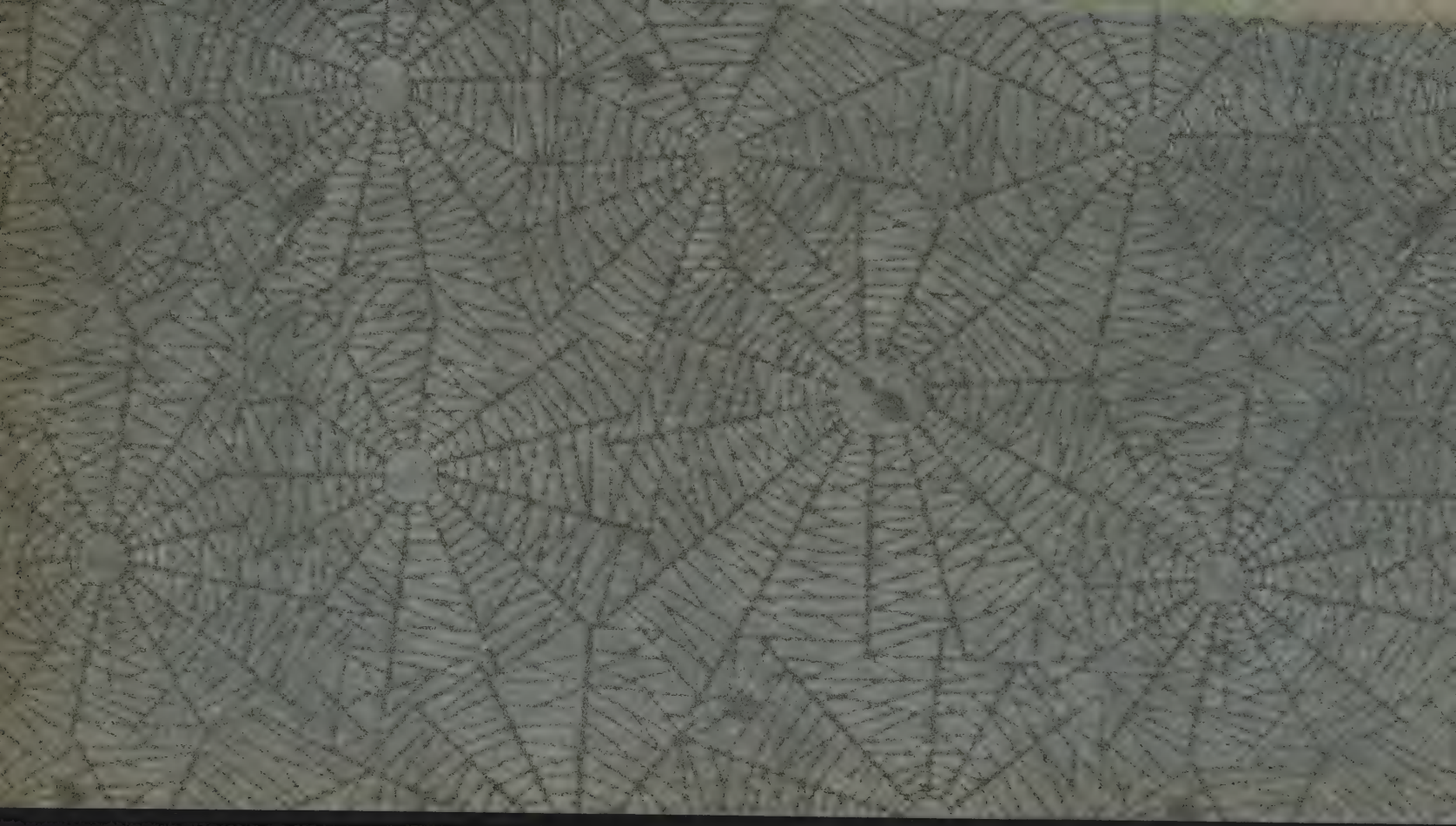
The bishop was touched by these moving words.

Mr. van Koppen, wearing a benevolent twinkle in his eye, said to himself:

"What a lordly liar! Almost as good as myself."

Luncheon was announced.





Chapter XXXVI

"You are quite right," the Count was saying to Mr. Heard. "The ideal cuisine should display an individual character; it should offer a menu judiciously chosen from the kitchen-workshops of the most diverse lands and peoples—a menu reflecting the master's alert and fastidious taste. Is there anything better, for instance, than a genuine Turkish pilaff? The Poles and Spaniards, too, have some notable culinary creations. And if I were able to carry out my ideas on this point I would certainly add to my list of dishes a few of those strange Oriental confections which Mr. Keith has successfully taught his Italian chef. There is suggestion about them; they conjure up visions of that rich and glowing East which I would give many years of my remaining life to see."

"Then why not do what I have proposed several times already?" queried the millionaire. "I am in the East every winter; we reckon this year to reach

Bangkok the first fortnight in November. We can find room for you on board. We'll make room! Your company would give me more pleasure than I can say."

Count Caloveglia was probably the only male person on earth to whom the owner of the *Flutter-by* would have extended such an invitation.

"My dear friend!" replied the other. "I shall never be able to repay your kindness, as it is. Alas, it cannot be done, not now. And don't you think," he went on, reverting to his theme, "that we might revive a few of those forgotten recipes of the past? Not their over-spiced entremets, I mean—their gross joints and pasties, their swans and peacocks—but those which deal, for example, with the preparation of fresh-water fishes? A pike, to my way of thinking, is a coarse, mud-born creature. But if you will take the trouble, as I once did, to dress a pike according to the complicated instructions of some obsolete cookery-book, you will find him sufficiently palatable, by way of a change."

"You would make an excellent chef!"

"It is plain," added Mr. Heard, "that the Count does not disdain to practise his skill upon the most ancient and honourable of domestic arts."

"Indeed I don't. I would cook *con amore* if I had leisure and materials. All culinary tasks should be performed with reverential love, don't you think so? To say that a cook must possess the requisite outfit of culinary skill and temperament— that is hardly more than saying that a soldier must appear

in uniform. You can have a bad soldier in uniform. The true cook must have not only those externals, but a large dose of general worldly experience. He is the perfect blend, the only perfect blend, of artist and philosopher. He knows his worth: he holds in his palm the happiness of mankind, the welfare of generations yet unborn. That is why you will never obtain adequate human nourishment from a young girl or boy. Such persons may do for housework, but not in the kitchen. Never in the kitchen! No one can aspire to be a philosopher who is in an incomplete state of physical development. The true cook must be mature; she must know the world from her social point of view, however humble it be; she must have pondered concerning good and evil, in however lowly and incongruous a fashion; she must have passed through the crucible of sin and suffering or, at the very least—it is often the same thing—of married life. Best of all, she should have a lover, a fierce and brutal lover who beats and caresses her in turns; for every woman worthy of the name is subject and entitled to fluctuating psychic needs—needs which must be satisfied to the very core, if the master is to enjoy sound, healthy fare."

"We don't always allow them to fulfil that last condition," observed Mr. Heard.

"I know we don't. That is precisely why we are so often poisoned or starved, instead of being cheered with wholesome food."

"You were speaking of woman-cooks?" asked

van Koppen.

"I was. But it stands to reason that no woman can be trusted with so responsible a task—so sacred a mission, I ought to call it—in regions south of Bordeaux or East of Vienna. Among many other reasons, the whole sex is too drowsy, outside that radius. And if she drinks a little——"

"Drinks a little?"

"If she drinks a little, why, it is all to the good. It shows that she is fully equipped on the other side of her dual nature. It proves that she possesses the prime requisite of the artist; sensitiveness and a capacity for enthusiasm. Indeed, I often doubt whether you will ever derive well-flavoured victuals from the atelier of an individual who honestly despises or fears—it is the same thing—the choicest gift of God. Andrea, my man here, is abstemious to the last degree; not, I am glad to say, from conviction or ill-health—it is the same thing—but because he is incurably desirous of saving my money. What is the consequence? You can taste his self-imposed asceticism in the very *zabbaglione*, for which I must really apologize! It speaks to the eye, but not to the heart. Let us hope the coffee will be more harmonious."

"Would you not include some of our American dishes in your bill of fare?"

"To be sure I would; a fine selection. I have most pleasant recollections of the cuisine of Baltimore."

"You can get all those things in New York."

"No doubt; no doubt. But one thing invariably

distresses me in transatlantic dinners: the unseemly haste in rising. One might really think the company were ashamed of so natural and jovial a function as that to which a dining-room is consecrated. And then, have you not noticed that, sitting at table, a certain intellectual tone, an atmosphere of a definite kind, is insensibly generated among the guests, whatever the subject of conversation may be? They are often quite unaware of its existence, but it hangs none the less about the room and binds the inmates together for the time being. Suddenly we are bidden to rise and betake ourselves elsewhere; to sit on other chairs in a different temperature among different surroundings. It is a wrench. That peculiar atmosphere is dissipated; the genius of the earlier moment driven out beyond recapture; we must adapt ourselves to other conditions and begin anew, often with a good deal of trouble—often, how often, against our inclination! I call that a perverse custom. Every state of the mind, whether we are in society or alone, should be pressed to the last drop, irrespective of whether we happen to have swallowed a final mouthful of food or not. When the conversation has died, as everything must die, from sheer inability to draw further breaths of life, then is the time to break up that old encircling dome of thought; to construct a fresh one, if need be, in a fresh environment."

"I confess," said the American, "it has always struck me as rather barbarous—this running away. I like to linger. But the ladies don't. They know

that their dresses show off better in a parlour than under the boards of a mahogany table; perhaps their conversation, too, sounds better among armchairs and rugs. So we run after them, as we generally do; instead of making them run after us" ("as I do," he added to himself). "But, Count! If you like our American dishes, why not get this man of yours to learn a few from the Duchess? I know she would gladly teach him; she is not jealous of her knowledge like a professional chef."

"I would have asked her that favour long ago, if Andrea had been a born cook, like Keith's man. Unfortunately he is quite different. The philosopher is represented in his nature, but not the artist. He is only a devoted Arcadian, overflowing with good intentions."

"And are they of no avail?" queried the bishop.

"I have been told that, in art and literature, they will atone for deficiency of natural talent. It may be so; some persons, at least, have been able to cajole their brain into believing this. However that may be, I do not think the rule can be extended into the domain of cookery. Good intentions—no. Nobody need attempt such an imposture on his stomach, an upright and uncompromising organ, which refuses to listen to nonsense. Or let them try the experiment. Gastritis will be the result of good intentions. . . ."

Mr. Heard stretched out his legs. He was beginning to feel at ease. He liked this comely old man; he detected an abiding quality in his outlook

and person. And he felt at home in these surroundings. There was an air of simplicity and refinement in that calm ground-floor chamber, with its subdued light filtering through windows that opened upon the courtyard, groined vaulting of noble proportions, stucco frieze stained with age to an ivory hue, and those other decorations which the Count, loyal to the traditions of old-world peasant architecture, had piously left unaltered—or, it may be, adapted to modern needs by touches so deft as not to reveal his own consummate artistry. Through the open door by which they had entered came breathings of warm wind laden with the suave odour of a tuft of Madonna lilies that grew, half neglected, in a shady corner. He had noticed them on his entry—how they stood in proud clusters, bending forward with mighty efforts to reach the light.

His eye strayed into the courtyard and moved about the green penumbra created by the fig tree's massy foliage; it glanced over fragments of statuary half buried under a riot of leaves and nodding flowers, and rested with complaisance upon the brickwork flooring of herring-bone pattern, coloured in a warm, velvety Indian-red. It was worn down here and there by tread of feet, and pleasantly marked with patches of emerald-green moss and amber-tinted streaks of light that played about its surface wherever the sunbeams could pierce the dense leafage overhead.

From where he sat he could see the Locri Faun

on its pedestal. The figure was drowned in twilight. It seemed to slumber.

Meanwhile Andrea, looking uncommonly ceremonious in white tie and white cotton gloves, was handing round the coffee. It was pronounced an unqualified success. "Absolutely harmonious," declared the bishop who had no hesitation, after a critical sip or two, in extending his approval to a curiously flavoured liqueur of unknown ingredients.

"From my little property on the mainland," the Count explained. "If it were a clear day I would take you up to my roof and show you the very site, although it is leagues and leagues away. But the south wind always casts a haze over the mainland at this time of day—a kind of veil."

Mr. van Koppen, connoisseur of cigars, opened his capacious case and offered its contents, without disclosing the fact that they were specially manufactured for him at a fabulous price.

"You will find them smokable, I hope. As a matter of fact it's no use trying to keep a cigar in good condition on the yacht. And it must be the same on an island like this. So far as tobacco is concerned, Nepenthe can be nothing but a ship at anchor."

"True," said the Count. "The moist sirocco is injurious to the finer growths."

"This south wind!" exclaimed Mr. Heard. "This African pest! Is there no other wind hereabouts? Tell me, Count, does the sirocco always blow?"

"So far as I have observed it blows constantly

during the spring and summer. Hardly less constantly in autumn," he added. "And in winter, often for weeks on end."

"Sounds promising," observed the bishop. "And has it no influence on the character?"

"The native is accustomed, or resigned. Foreigners, sometimes, are tempted to strange actions under its influence."

The American said:

"You spoke of amalgamating our cuisine with yours, or vice versa. It can doubtless be done, to the profit of both parties. Why not go a step further? Why not amalgamate our respective civilizations?"

"A pleasant dream, my friend, with which I have occasionally beguiled myself! Our contribution to human happiness, and that of America—are they not irreconcilable? What is yours? Comfort, time and labour-saving contrivances; abundance; in a word, all that is summed up under the denomination of utility. Ours, let us say, is beauty. No doubt we could saturate ourselves with each other's ideals, to our mutual advantage. But it would never he an amalgam; the joints would show. It would be a successful graft, rather than a fusion of elements. No; I do not see how beauty and utility are ever to be syncretized into a homogeneous conception. They are too antagonistic to coalesce."

"But there is abundant beauty and grandeur in modern American life," said the millionaire, "quite apart, I mean, from that of the natural scenery.

A fine steam-engine, for instance—I call that a beautiful thing, perfectly adapted to its end. Is its beauty really so antagonistic to that of your civilization?"

"I know that some excellent persons have been writing lately about the beauty of a swift-gliding motor-car and things of that kind. They are right, in one sense of the word. For there is a beauty in mechanical fitness which no art can enhance. But it is not the beauty of which I spoke."

"And therefore," observed the bishop, "we ought to have another word for it."

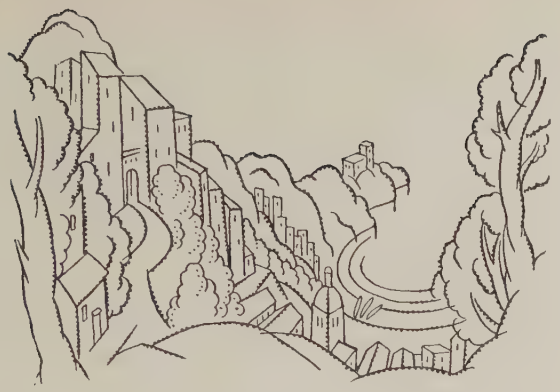
"Precisely, my dear sir! We ought to have another word. All values are continually being revised, and tested anew. Are they not? We have been restating moral values within the last half-century; it is the same with artistic ones. New canons of taste, new standards, are continually being evolved; there is a general widening and multiplying of notions. This, I think, ought to make us careful as to the words we employ, and ready to coin new ones whenever a new idea is to be expressed. If we enlarge our concepts, we should likewise enlarge our vocabulary. When I spoke of beauty, I used the word in its narrow classical meaning, a meaning which may be out of fashion, but which has the great advantage that it happens to be irrevocably fixed and defined for us by what the ancients themselves have handed down in the way of art and criticism. This particular beauty, I say, is irreconcilable with that other beauty of

which you spoke."

"How so?" asked the millionaire.

"There resides, for example, in Hellenic sculpture a certain ingredient—what shall we call it? Let us call it the factor of strangeness, of mystery! It is a vague emanation which radiates from such works of art, and gives us a sense of their universal applicability to all our changing moods and passions. That, I suppose, is why we call them ever young. They beckon to all of us familiarly and yet, as it were, from an unexplored world. They speak to us at all seasons in some loving and yet enigmatical language, such language as we may read, at times, in the eyes of a child that wakes from sleep. Now the swiftest and fairest steam-engine in the world is not for ever young; it grows obsolete and ends, after a short life, on the scrap-heap. That is to say, where usefulness enters, this spirit of mystery, of eternal youth, is put to flight. And there is yet another element of classical beauty which is equally at variance with your modern conception of it: the element of authority. Beholding the Praxitelean Eros the veriest ruffian feels compelled to reverence the creator and his work. 'Who was the man?' he asks; for he acknowledges that such things impose themselves upon his untutored mind. Now a certain Monsieur Cadillac builds the most beautiful motor-cars. Who is this man? We do not care a fig about him. He is probably a Jewish syndicate. Such being the case, I cannot bring myself to reverence Monsieur Cadillac and his cars. They are com-

fortable, but that factor of authority, which compels our homage to the Eros, is wholly lacking. Yet both things are called beautiful. That we should apply the same word to products so different, so hopelessly conflicting, as those of Praxiteles and Monsieur Cadillac—what does it prove? It proves our poverty of invention. And what does it explain? It explains our confusion of thought."



Chapter XXXVII

The millionaire remarked:

"I suppose the human outlook has shifted with the years. Democracy has changed your old point of view."

"Assuredly. No American, no modern of any race, I fancy, can divest himself of the notion that one man is as good as another; in the eyes of God, they add—meaning in their own eyes. No Greek, no ancient of any race, I fancy, could have burdened himself with so preposterous a delusion. Democracy has killed my point of view. It has substituted progress for civilization. To appreciate things of beauty, as do the Americans, a man requires intelligence. Intelligence is compatible with progress. To create them, as did the Greeks, he requires intelligence and something else as well: time. Democracy, in abolishing slavery, has eliminated that element of time—an element which is indispensable to civilization."

"We have some fine slavery in America at this moment."

"I am using the word in the antique sense. Your modern slavery is of another kind. It has all the drawbacks and few of the advantages of the classic variety. It gives leisure to the wrong people—to those who praise the dignity of labour. Men who talk about the Dignity of Labour had better say as little as possible about civilization, for fear of confusing it with the North Pole."

The American laughed.

"That's one for me," he remarked.

"On the contrary! you are an admirable example of that happy graft which we mentioned just now."

"Progress and civilization!"exclaimed Mr. Heard. "One uses those words so much in my walk of life that, thinking it over, I begin to wonder whether they mean more than this: that there are perpetual readjustments going on. They are supposed to indicate an upward movement, some vague step in the direction of betterment which, frankly, I confess myself unable to perceive. What is the use of civilization if it makes a man unhappy and unhealthy? The uncivilized African native is happy and healthy. The poor creatures among whom I worked, in the slums of London, are neither the one nor the other; they are civilized. I glance down the ages, and see nothing but—change! And perhaps not even change. Mere difference of opinion as to the value of this or that in different times and places."

"Pardon me! I was using the words in a specific sense. What I mean by progress is the welding together of society for whatever ends. Progress is a centripetal movement, obliterating man in the mass. Civilization is centrifugal; it permits, it postulates, the assertion of personality. The terms are, therefore, not synonymous. They stand for hostile and divergent movements. Progress subordinates. Civilization co-ordinates. The individual emerges in civilization. He is submerged in progress."

"You might call civilization a placid lake," said the American, "and the other a river or torrent."

"Exactly!" remarked Mr. Heard. "The one is static, the other dynamic. And which of the two, Count, would you say was the more beneficial to humanity?"

"Ah! For my part I would not bring such consideration to bear on the point. We may deduce, from the evolution of society, that progress is the newer movement, since the State, which welds together, is of more recent growth than the individualistic family or clan. This is as far as I care to go. To debate whether one be better for mankind than the other betrays what I call an anthropomorphic turn of mind; it is therefore a problem which, so far as I am concerned, does not exist. I content myself with establishing the fact that progress and civilization are incompatible, mutually exclusive."

"Do you mean to say," asked the millionaire, "that it is impossible to be progressive and civilized at the same time?"

"That is what I mean to say. Now if America stands for progress, this old world may be permitted —with a reasonable dose of that flattery which we accord to the dead—to represent civilization. Tell me, Mr. van Koppen, how do you propose to amalgamate or reconcile such ferociously antagonistic strivings? I fear we will have to wait for the millennium."

"The millennium!" echoed Mr. Heard. "That is another of those unhappy words which are always cropping up in my department."

"Why unhappy?" asked Mr. van Koppen.

"Because they mean nothing. The millennium will never come."

"Why not?"

"Because nobody wants it to come. They want tangible things. Nobody wants a millennium."

"Which is very fortunate," observed the Count. "For if they did, the Creator would be considerably embarrassed how to arrange matters, seeing that every man's millennium differs from that of his neighbour. Mine is not the same as yours. Now I wonder, Mr. van Koppen—I wonder what your millennium would be like?"

"I wonder! I believe I never gave it a thought. I have had other things to puzzle out."

And the millionaire straightway proceeded to think, in his usual clear-cut fashion. "Something with girls in it," he soon concluded, inwardly. Then aloud:

"I guess my millennium would be rather a

contradictory sort of business. I should require tobacco, to begin with. And the affair would certainly not be complete, Count, without a great deal of your company. The millennium of other people may be more simple. That of the Duchess, for example, is at hand. She is about to join the Roman Catholic Church."

"That reminds me," said Mr. Heard. "She gave me some remarkable tea-cakes not long ago. Delicious. She said they were your specialty."

"You have found them out, have you?" laughed the American. "I always tell her that once a man begins on those tea-cakes there is no reason on earth, that I can think of, why he should ever stop again. All the same, I nearly overate myself the other day. That was because we had a late luncheon on board. It shall never occur again—the late luncheon, I mean. Have you discovered, by the way, whether the business of Miss Wilberforce has been settled?"

Mr. Heard shook his head.

"Is that the person," enquired the Count, "who is reported to drink to excess? I have never spoken to her. She belongs presumably to the lower classes —to those who extract from alcohol the pleasurable emotions which we derive from a good play, or music, or a picture gallery."

"She is a lady."

"Indeed? Then she has relapsed into the intemperance of her inferiors. That is not pretty."

"Temperance!" said the bishop. "Another of those words which I am always being obliged to use. Pray

tell me, Count, what you mean by temperance."

"I should call it the exercise of our faculties and organs in such a manner as to combine the maximum of pleasure with the minimum of pain."

"And who is judge of what constitutes the dividing line between use and abuse?"

"We cannot do better, I imagine, than go to our own bodies for an answer to that question. They will tell us exactly how far we may proceed with impunity."

"In that case," said the millionaire, "if you drink a little too much occasionally—only occasionally, I mean!—you would not call that intemperance?"

"Certainly not. We are not Puritans here. We do not give wrong names to things. What you suggest would be by the way of a change, I presume —like the eating of a pike; something we do not indulge in every day. If I were to come home a little joyful now and then, do you know what these people would say? They would say: 'The old gentleman is pleased to be merry to-night. Bless his heart! May the wine do him good.' But if I behaved as Miss Wilberforce is reported to do, they would say: 'That old man is losing self-control. He is growing intemperate. Every evening! It is not a pretty sight.' They never call it wrong. Their mode of condemnation is to say that it is not pretty. The ethical moment, you observe, is replaced by an æsthetic one. That is the Mediterranean note. It is the merit of the Roman Church that she left us some grains of common sense in regard to minor morals."

The bishop remarked:

"What I have seen of the local Catholicism strikes me as a kind of pantomime. That is the fault of my upbringing, no doubt."

"Oh, I am not referring to externals! Externally, of course, our Church is the purest rococo——"

Mr. Heard was expanding in this congenial atmosphere; he felt himself in touch with permanent things. He glanced at the speaker. How charming he looked, this silvery-haired old aristocrat! His ample and gracious personality, his leisurely discourse—how well they accorded with the environment! He suggested, in a manner, the secret of youth and all that is glad, unclouded, eternal; he was a reflection, a belated flower, of the classic splendour which lay in ruins about him. Such a man, he thought, deserves to be happy and successful. What joy it must have been to a person of his temperament—the chance discovery of the Locri Faun!

A great stillness brooded upon the enclosure beyond. The shadows had shifted. Sunny patches lay, distributed in fresh patterns, upon the old brickwork flooring. An oval shaft of light, glinting through the foliage, had struck the pedestal of the Faun and was stealthily crawling up its polished surface. He looked at the statue. It was still slumbering in the shade. But a subtle change had spread over the figure, or was it, he wondered, merely a change in the state of his own mind, due to what the Count had said? There was energy,

now, in those tense muscles. The slightest touch, he felt, would unseal the enchantment and cause life to flow through the dull metal.

Mr. van Koppen was slightly ruffled.

"Are you not a little hard on the Puritans?" he asked. "Where would we have been without them in America?"

"And after all," added the bishop, "they cleared up an infinity of abuses. They were temperate, at all events! Too temperate in some matters, I am inclined to think; they did not always allow for human weakness. They went straight back to the Bible."

The Count shook his head slowly.

"The Bible," he said, "is the most intemperate book I have ever read."

"Dear me!"

Mr. van Koppen, a tactful person, scented danger ahead. He remarked:

"I did not know Italians read the Bible. Where did you become acquainted with it?"

"In New York. I often amused myself strolling about the Jewish quarter there and studying the inhabitants. Wonderful types, wonderful poses! But hard to decipher, for a person of my race. One day I said to myself: I will read their literature: it may be of assistance. I went through the Talmud and the Bible. They helped me to understand those people and their point of view."

"What is their point of view?"

"That God is an overseer. This, I think, is the

keynote of the Bible. And it explains why the Bible has always been regarded as an exotic among Greco-Latin races, who are all pagans at heart. Our God is not an overseer; he is a partaker. For the rest, we find the whole trend of the Bible, its doctrinal tone, antagonistic to those ideals of equanimity and moderation which, however disregarded in practice, have always been held up hereabouts as theoretically desirable. In short, we southerners lack what you possess: an elective affinity with that book. One may wonder how the morality of those tawny Semites was enabled to graft itself upon your alien white-skinned race with such tenacity as to influence your whole national development. Well, I think I have at last puzzled it out," he added, "to my own satisfaction at least."

The bishop interposed with a laugh:

"I may tell you, Count, that I am not in the episcopal mood to-day. Not at all. Never felt less episcopal in my life. For that matter, it is our English ecclesiastics who have dealt some of the most serious blows at Biblical authority of late, with their modern exegesis. Pray go on!"

"I imagine it is nothing but a matter of racial temperament."

"Goth and Latin?"

"One does not always like to employ such terms; they are so apt to cover deficiency of ideas, or to obscure the issue. But certainly the sun which colours our complexion and orders our daily habits, influences at the same time our character and out-

look. The almost hysterical changes of light and darkness, summer and winter, which have impressed themselves on the literature of the North, are unknown here. Northern people, whether from climatic or other causes, are prone to extremes, like their own myths and sagas. The Bible is essentially a book of extremes. It is a violent document. The Goth or Anglo-Saxon has taken kindly to this book because it has always suited his purposes. It has suited his purposes because, according to his abruptly varying moods, he has never been at a loss to discover therein exactly what he wanted—authority for every grade of emotional conduct, from savage vindictiveness to the most abject self-abasement. One thing he would never have found, had he cared to look for it—an incitement to live the life of reason, to strive after intellectual honesty and self-respect, and to keep his mind open to the logic of his five senses. That is why, during the troubled Middle Ages when the oscillations of national and individual life were yet abrupter—when, therefore, that classical quality of temperance was more than ever at a discount—the Bible took so firm a hold upon you. Its unquiet teachings responded to the unquiet yearnings of men. Your conservatism, your reverence for established institutions, has done the rest. No! I do not call to mind any passages in the Bible commending the temperate philosophic life; though it would be strange if so large a miscellany did not contain a few sound reflections. Temperance," he concluded, as though speaking to him-

self—"temperance! All the rest is embroidery."

Mr. Heard was thoughtful. The American observed:

"That side of the case never struck me before. How about Solomon's proverbs?"

"Maxims of exhaustion, my dear friend. It is easy to preach to me. I am an old man. I can read Solomon with a certain patience. We want something for our children—something which does not blight or deny, but vivifies and guides aright; something which makes them hold up their heads. A friend, an older brother; not a pedagogue. I would never recommend a boy to study these writings. They would lower his spirits and his self-respect. Solomon, like all reformed debauchees, has a depressing influence on the young."

"Do you know England well?" asked Mr. Heard.

"Very little. I have spent a few days in Liverpool and London, here and there, on my periodical journeyings to the States. Kind friends supply me with English books and papers; the excellent Sir Herbert Street sends me more than I can possibly digest! I confess that much of what I read was an enigma to me till I had studied the Bible. Its teachings seem to have filtered, warm and fluid, through the veins of your national and private life. Then, slowly, they froze hard, congealing the whole body into a kind of crystal. Your ethics are stereotyped in black-letter characters. A gargoyle morality."

"It is certainly difficult," said Mr. van Koppen,

"for an Anglo-Saxon to appraise this book objectively. His mind has been saturated with it in childhood to such an extent as to take on a definite bias."

"Like the ancients with their Iliad. Where is a truer poet than Homer? Yet the worship of him became a positive bane to independent creative thought. What good things could be written about the withering influence of Homer upon the intellectual life of Rome!"

The bishop asked:

"You think the Bible has done the same for us?"

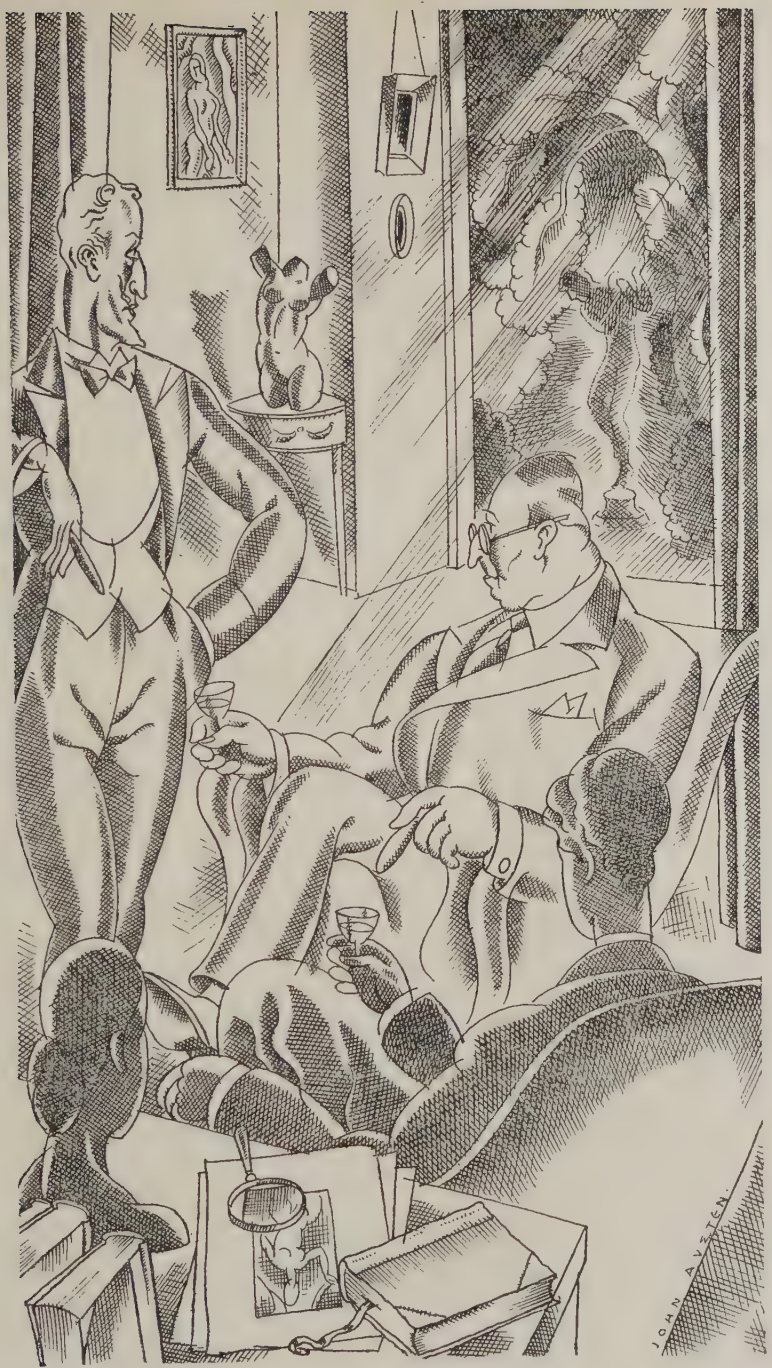
"I think it accounts for some Byzantine traits in your national character and for the formlessness and hesitancy which I, at least, seem to detect in the demeanour of many individual Anglo-Saxons. They realize that their traditional upbringing is opposed to truth. It gives them a sense of insecurity. It makes them shy and awkward. Poise! That is what they need, and what this unbalanced Eastern stuff will never give them."

"The withering influence of Homer: surely that is a bad sign?" asked the American.

"And that of the Bible?" added Mr. Heard.

"How shall a plant survive, save by withering now and then? If the ancients had not exhausted themselves with Homer, the soil might not have been ready for our Renaissance. A bad sign? Who can tell! Good and bad—I question whether these are respectable words to use."

"You are content, as you observed before, to


JOAN AVSTEN

establish a fact?"

"Amply content. I leave the rest to the academicians. And the only fact we seem to have established is that your notions of morality resemble my notions of beauty in this one point: neither of them are up to date. You will have me admire a steam-engine. Why? Because of its delicately adjusted mechanism, its perfect adaptation to modern needs. So be it. I will modify my conception of what is fair in appearance. I will admire your steam-engine, and thereby bring my ideals of beauty up to date. Will you modify your conception of what is fair in conduct? Will you admire something more adapted to modern needs than those intemperate Hebrew doctrines; something with more delicately adjusted mechanism? The mendicant friar, that flower of Oriental ethics—he is not up to date. He resembles all Semites. He lacks self-respect. He apologizes for being alive. It is not pretty—to apologize for being alive!"

The American observed:

"I should say that even our greatest bigots, nowadays, don't take those old doctrines as seriously as you seem to think."

"I daresay they don't. But they profess to reproach themselves for not doing so. And that is more contemptible. It adds insincerity to imbecility."

A sunny smile played about his face as he spoke these words. It was evident that his thoughts were already far away. The bishop, following the di-

rection of his glance, saw that it rested upon the statuette of the Faun whose head and shoulders were now enveloped in a warm beam of light. Under that genial touch the old relic seemed to have woke up from its slumber. Blood was throbbing in its veins. It was in movement; it dominated the scene in its emphatic affirmation of joy.

Mr. Heard, his eyes fixed upon the statuette, now realized the significance of what had been said. He began to see more clearly. Soon it dawned upon him that not joy alone was expressed by the figure. Another quality, more evasive yet more compelling, resided in its subtle grace: the element of mystery. There, emprisoned in the bronze, dwelt some benignant oracle.

Puzzle as he would, that oracle refused to clothe itself in words.

What could it be?

A message of universal application, "loving and enigmatical," as the old man had called it. True! It was a greeting from an unknown friend in an unknown land; something familiar from the dim past or distant future; something that spoke of well-being—plain to behold, hard to expound, like the dawning smile of childhood.

Chapter XXXVIII

Towards evening, Mr. van Koppen drove the bishop down in the carriage which he usually hired for the whole of his stay on Nepenthe. They said little, having talked themselves out with the Count. The American seemed to be thinking about something. Mr. Heard's eye roamed over the landscape, rather anxiously.

"I don't like that new cloud above the volcano," he observed.

"Looks like ashes. Looks as if it might drift in our direction, doesn't it, if the wind were strong enough to move it? Do you see much of the Count?" he enquired.

"Not as much as I should like. What excellent veal cutlets those were! So white and tender. Quite different from the veal we get in England. And that aromatic wine went uncommonly well with them. It was his own growth, I suppose."

"Very likely. From that little vineyard which

produces so many good things." He chuckled softly. "As to English veal—I never yet tasted any worth eating. If you don't slaughter a calf till it's grown into a cow—why, you're not likely to get anything but beef."

"They say the English cannot cook, in spite of the excellence of their prime materials."

"I think the prime materials are at fault. They sacrifice everything to size. It's barbaric. Those greasy Southdown sheep! It's the same with their fowls; they're large, but insipid—very different from the little things you get down here. Now a goose is capital fodder. But if you grow him only for his weight, you destroy his quality and flavour; you get a lump of blubber instead of a bird."

"Apple sauce?"

"I don't like apples in any shape. A sour kind of potato, I call them. They eat an awful lot of apples in our country. That is what makes so many of our women as flat as boards, in front and behind—especially in the Eastern States. It's apple-eating. Apples ought to be taxed. They ruin the female figure. I'm not sure that they don't sour the character as well."

"Don't you care about our English vegetables?"

"Can't say I'm much in love with them, Mr. Heard. Brussels sprouts, for instance—I'm very partial to Brussels sprouts. But the things they give you over there are the size of a bath sponge, and much the same taste, I reckon. And the carrots! A carrot ought to be small and round and yellow,

it ought to melt in the mouth like a plum. Those carrots aren't carrots at all. They're walking sticks. And the peas! No, I don't care about English peas. Too large and too lively for me."

"Lively?"

"That's it. Lively. I shall never forget my first experience of them," he went on, laughing. "There were two or three in the dish; just two or three; filled it up nicely. Looked like cannon-balls. What do they expect me to do with these things? I wondered. I didn't like to ask the waiter. One doesn't care to be taken for an ignorant stranger. Well, I landed one on my plate and began carving at it, to see if there was anything eatable inside the shell, when the durned thing slipped away from my knife and crashed on to the floor. Bounced up like a marble. I called for a nutcracker—'I shall want the largest you've got,' I said. They couldn't find one. Now I'm not the sort of man, Mr. Heard, to be beaten by a vegetable, if it really was a vegetable. Because, you see, it behaved more like a blamed mineral. I sent for the head waiter, and took him into my confidence. I tried to talk English, like I'm talking to you. 'What d'ye call these things?' I asked. 'Marrowfats, Sir.' 'Ah, I thought they weren't peas. You've got *petits pois* down on the bill of fare. Better get that put right. And now, how d'ye eat them. 'You bite them, Sir.' 'What's that?' 'You just bite them!' That's what he said. 'You bite them.' Of course I didn't believe him. I thought it was just a bit of English humour,

especially as the other waiter was looking the opposite way all the time. Well, like a fool, I said to myself: 'No harm in trying!' I've got pretty sharp teeth, you know, for a boy of my age. That's how I managed to do what a lot of you younger fellows couldn't have done. I got them fixed into the softest of that bunch of marrowfats. But as to pulling them out again! The head waiter, you bet, had disappeared. And the other fellow was standing at the window with his back to me. Looking up the street, I should say, to see if it was going to rain."

After this little outburst, the millionaire seemed to have nothing more to say.

He was thinking. . . .

Cornelius van Koppen loved a good liar. He knew something about the gentle art. It was an art, he used to say, which no fool should be allowed to cultivate. There were too many amateurs knocking about. These bunglers spoiled the trade. Without doing any good to themselves, they roused distrust; they rubbed the fine bloom off human credulity. His puritan conscience was enraged at petty thefts, petty forgeries, petty larcenies. That was why he despised that otherwise excellent person, the Financial Commissioner for Nicaragua, whose wildest flights of embezzlement never exceeded a few hundred dollars. He respected a man who, like himself, could work in the grand style. To play upon the credulity of a continent—it was Napoleonic, it was like stealing a kingdom; it was not stealing at all. This, he shrewdly suspected, was what his good

friend the Count was engaged upon. That delightful old man was working in the grand style.

Bronzes, ancient or modern, were Greek to Mr. van Koppen. He could not tell the difference between the art of Clodion and of Myron—had, in fact, never heard the names of these good people and did not particularly care to hear them; he paid Sir Herbert Street for that part of the business. But he had picked up, in the course of his long humanitarian career, a good deal of general knowledge. Old Koppen was no fool. He was intelligent; intelligence, as the Count had said, being perfectly compatible with progress. The millionaire could put two and two together as fast as most men; he was celebrated, even among his quick-witted compatriots, for an uncanny faculty of walking round people without getting off his chair. Common sense, he called it.

Many a time had he listened to Count Caloveglia's rounded periods anent the Locri Faun. Taking his own personal experience as a guide, he had come to the conclusion that a man does not explain things quite so satisfactorily, does not talk about things quite so enthusiastically, unless he has some business in hand. Everything fitted into a hypothesis which had been slowly maturing in his mind, namely, that he was confronted by a fraud, a really noble fraud, a fraud after his own heart, a fraud deserving the fullest support of every sensible man and woman.

That vineyard, for instance, with those antiqui-

ties. A good many friends of his in the States had made their pile out of salted gold mines. Why not salt a vineyard? Oh yes; everything fitted in beautifully. The remoteness of that vineyard . . . a town like Locri was obviously unsafe, too public a place for such important discoveries. The conscientious Sir Herbert would certainly want to make enquiries on the spot—enquiries which would prove that no Faun had ever been found there. And that would ruin everything. Therefore the statue had been "carried" to the vineyard in ancient times by "some young and ardent lover of art." Carried, ha, ha! His knowledge of human nature made him doubt whether the Locri Faun had ever in its life made a further journey than to Caloveglia's shady courtyard from that mysterious, dusty shed at the back of his house. Or the Demeter either. That "sadly mutilated head" was a feeler—a rehearsal. They both came "from the same workshop." Excellent! That shed was the workshop—the birthplace of these two antiques; the Count himself their old Hellenic creator.

Andrea, no doubt, was in the secret.

These art experts! Here was Street, one of the best of them, a man of celebrity in his department, solemnly pronouncing for the authenticity of the fake—in the full and innocent conviction that it really was authentic. A sucking babe. This man, he could see by his simple society face, had not even made an arrangement with the Count as to a commission for himself in the event of a purchase being

concluded. He was satisfied with his salary. These experts—what a crowd of fools they were! Especially the honest ones.

None the less, he was delighted with Sir Herbert's opinion. It was exactly what he wanted. For he meant to help the Count who, he was sure, would never accept a cent from him save under a pretext like that of the sale of the Faun. He loved old Caloveglia. There was something clean and purposeful about him. His friendship with such a man filled up what he knew to be a void in his own equipment as citizen of the world. And the Count was working—was lying—for a worthy purpose: a daughter's dowry. For that reason alone he was deserving of assistance.

Mr. van Koppen was unmarried. Knowing life as he did, from its more seamy or mercenary side, he had never brought himself to accept a single one of several hundred offers of marriage which had been more or less overtly made to him—to his millions. He loved the sex, as a whole; but distrusted them individually. He thought he knew exactly what they were after. Pearl necklaces and things. He was a good American; fond of bestowing pearl necklaces. But he liked to give them when, and to whom, he fancied; he meant to be his own master and to keep his painfully gotten millions under his own control. All of which, far from extinguishing, actually fostered that queer bachelor's feeling of reverential awe for the married state and its results. Every form of courage and

success appealed to van Koppen—none more than the reckless impetuosity of a man who speculates in such a delirious lottery and sometimes actually draws a prize. Such had been Count Caloveglia's portion. His marriage had plainly been a love-match, a success; its result, this offspring—a daughter of whom any father might be proud. Mr. van Koppen thoroughly understood the Count's position. These Italians need dowries for their girls. Well, he should have one! What did it signify? One pearl necklace the less for some operatic charmer. Not worth talking about. Among all his various benefactions, none was ever projected with a lighter heart, with more sincere pleasure. It made him glad to be a millionaire.

All the details had been settled. The *Flutterby* was sailing in a day or two. The relic would be brought on board, at dead of night, by the faithful Andrea, who would return to the Count with a cheque in his pocket. It was a considerable sum; so considerable that Caloveglia had displayed great hesitation in accepting it. But the millionaire pointed out that the parties must be guided by Sir Herbert's opinion. What was the good, he asked, of employing a specialist? Sir Herbert Street had declared the bronze to be priceless, unique. His employer, therefore, insisted on paying what the other had called "an adequate amount, if the value of such a work of art can be expressed in monetary figures at all." There was nothing more to be said. The Count gave way, with graceful re-

luctance. A sham ancestry having been manufactured for the masterpiece (it was proved to come from Asia Minor) in order to elude the vigilance of the Italian Government, the Locri Faun could thereafter be freely displayed to the American public, and Sir Herbert Street was probably right in foretelling that it would be the show piece of the millionaire's museum—artists and antiquarians flocking to see it from every part of the world.

And Mr. van Koppen, as he drove along, was thinking of that cheque; he was converting the dollars into francs. They made rather an awkward sum. He decided to round it off, if only for the sake of appearances; a further reason for not sending the cheque till the last moment, together with a carefully worded letter to allay the Count's scruples. The old fellow might otherwise return the balance, in a fit of conscientiousness. Like himself, Count Caloveglia was infernally, and very properly, punctilious—in small matters.

Yes, there was some fun, at times, in being a millionaire. Or a sculptor either, for that matter! For it evidently took some doing—a little thing like that Locri Faun. It took some doing. And it was worth doing: that was the main point. A man who could bamboozle Sir Herbert Street—such a man deserved to be supported. And what if the truth ultimately leaked out? Had he not acted with the best intentions, under the written advice of an expert? Far from feeling uneasy, Mr. van Koppen smiled at the thought of how his millions, backed

by the opinion of a connoisseur of international reputation, had enabled him to play yet one more trick upon that great Republic whose fathomless gullibility no one had ever exploited to better purpose than himself. . . .

Chapter XXXIX

Mr. Eames was waiting for the bishop, according to appointment.

"How about Mrs. Meadows?" he at once began.

"She was out, invisible. I waited nearly two hours and then lunched with Count Caloveglia. By the way, have you seen anything of Denis lately?"

"No. Why?"

"The old man seemed to be concerned about him. He asked me to make enquiries. Van Koppen thought that he might have got into trouble with some girl. But that strikes me as very unlikely. He may be a little homesick and lonely, so far from his mother."

The bibliographer said:

"I understand Mr. van Koppen is quite an authority on girls. As to Denis, I saw him last—when was it? Oh, not so very long ago. The day all those funny things happened; those portents. We walked up and down together on this very

terrace. Perhaps he has left the island, like that wretched mineralogist who promised me—never mind! He seemed all right then. A little depressed, perhaps. Yes; a little depressed, now I come to think of it. But the Count need not be anxious. This island is a great place for scares and rumours."

Mr. Heard was not satisfied.

"Do you believe the influence of Nepenthe can make northern people irresponsible for their actions? Keith does. Or how about the sirocco? Can it upset their nerves to such an extent?"

"Not my nerves. I have heard of people making fools of themselves and then blaming the Creator. Often! And of course, if one begins to brood over accidentals like the weather, one is sure to become a lunatic sooner or later. Weather was not made for that purpose. If you come to think of it, how few days there are when a man can honestly say that the weather is quite to his liking! It is nearly always too hot or too cold or too wet or too dry or too windy. I don't trouble myself about sirocco. Why should Denis? He is not nearly as much of a fool as many people look. And I would not listen to Keith. He moves among hyperbolas."

Mr. Heard felt slightly relieved. What a sensible fellow this was; so matter-of-fact and sure of his ground. The ideal scholar. Sirocco did not exist for him. He stood aloof from human passions and infirmities.

It was plain that the bishop had never heard that story about the *ballon captif*.

"For my part," he said, "I am beginning to object to this south wind. I never felt it worse than today. Phew! Stifling! One can hardly breathe. My shirt is sticking to my back. Suppose we sit down somewhere?"

They found a bench, in view of the sea and the volcano. The population moved sedately up and down before their eyes.

"Is it always like this?" enquired Mr. Heard.

"Spring is a little warmer than usual. Or perhaps one should say that summer has begun earlier. The sirocco is the same, year after year, although there is a kind of conspiracy among the foreign residents to say that it happens to be worse than usual that particular season. It never varies."

"What does your Perrelli say on the subject?"

Mr. Eames glanced at him distrustfully.

"You are trying to chaff me," he said. "Serves me right for talking so much this morning. I am afraid I bored you dreadfully."

The bishop wanted to know.

"Then I may tell you that Monsignor Perrelli does not so much as mention the south wind. He names all the others and has some capital observations on the anchorages of the island as adapted to different winds and seasons. He has also extracted from old chronicles the records of the great storms of 1136, 1342, 1373, 1460, and so on; but never discloses the fact that they all blew from the south. He says the air is pleasant, tempered by gentle breezes from the sea. The word sirocco does

not occur in his pages save once, when he laments its prevalence on the mainland."

"The old humbug!"

A little shiver ran through Mr. Eames. Then he observed, in a suave tone of voice:

"He was an historian of the period, an agreeable gentleman telling others of his kind what he knows will be of interest to them. That is what makes his work attractive to me: the personality of the writer. The facts that he records, taken in conjunction with those he slurs over or omits—they give one such an insight into changing human nature! You can construct the character of a man and his age not only from what he does and says, but from what he fails to say and do."

"Modern historians are not like that," said Mr. Heard. "They give you the truth to the best of their ability. It is rather dry reading sometimes. I would like to borrow your Perrelli for a day or two, if you don't mind."

"I'll send it round, together with some old prints of this island and modern photographs. You will then see what I mean. The prints are not exactly true to nature; these people did not want to be true to nature. And yet they convey a better impression of the place than the modern pictures. Perhaps there are two truths: the truth of fact and that of suggestion. Perrelli is very suggestive; romance grafted upon erudition, and blossoming out of it! So imaginative! He has a dissertation on the fishes of Nepenthe—it reads like a poem and is

yet full of practical gastronomic hints. Can you picture Virgil collaborating with Apicius?"

The bishop said:

"Horace might have got on better with that old bon-vivant."

"Horace could never have had a hand in this chapter. He lacks the idealistic tinge. He could never have written about red mullets as Perrelli writes when he compares their skin to the fiery waves of Phlegethon, to the mantle of rosy-fingered dawn, to the blush of a maiden surprised in her bath, and then goes on to tell you how to cook the beast in thirty different ways and how to spit out the bones in the most noiseless, genteel fashion. That is Perrelli—so original, so leisurely. Always himself! He smiled as he wrote; there is not a shadow of doubt about it. In another section, on the fountains of the island, he deliberately indulges in the humour of some old mediæval schoolman. Then there is a chapter on the ecclesiastical conditions of the place under Florizel the Fat—it is full of veiled attacks on the religious orders of his own day; I suspect it got him into trouble, that chapter. I am sorry to say there is a good deal of loose talk scattered about his pages. I fear he was not altogether a pure-minded man. But I cannot bring myself to despise him. What do you think? Certain problems are always cropping up, aren't they?"

Mr. Eames suddenly looked quite troubled.

"They are," replied the bishop, who was not in

a mood to discuss ethics just then. "What are you going to do about it?" he added.

"About what?"

"This poetic omission on the part of Perrelli to mention the sirocco?"

"It has given me a deal of extra work, I can assure you. I have had to go into the whole question. I have tabulated no less than fifty-seven varieties of sirocco. Sailors' words, most of them; together with a handful of antiquated terms. Fifty-seven varieties. Twenty-three thousand words, up to the present, dealing with the south wind."

"That is a fair-sized foot-note," laughed the bishop. "A good slice of a book, I should call it."

"My foot-notes are to be printed in small type. In fact, I am thinking of casting the whole of this sirocco-material into an appendix. Too much, you think? Surely the number of words is not disproportionate to the subject? The south wind is a good slice of Nepenthe, is it not? . . . Look! That cloud has made up its mind to come our way after all. There will be another shower of ashes. Sirocco, you observe. . . ."

The terrace, meanwhile, had become crowded. Already the evening sun was slightly obscured behind a brown haze. Ashes were travelling fast. They began to fall, softly.

What was to be done? Everybody, mindful of the previous experience, was in favour of a second procession to take place immediately. The *parroco* held the same opinion. For form's sake, however,

he despatched a confidential messenger to learn the views of Mr. Parker, who was sitting dejectedly in his study with the incomplete Financial Report still staring him in the face. The Commissioner pulled himself together with praiseworthy alacrity and gave his whole mind to the question.

No. On due consideration, he was opposed to the idea of a procession. Having enjoyed, in various continents and various capacities, some experience of backing the same horse twice over, Mr. Parker was not in favour of demanding a second largesse from the Saint. It might spoil everything, he said. Let them wait till next morning. If there was a deep fall like last time, the experiment might be worth trying. But not just yet! While admitting that something ought to be done, it struck him as a hazardous proceeding to play fast and loose, in this fashion, with the reputation of a Saint.

His Reverence, duly impressed, waited for half an hour. It was then seen that the Nicaraguan Representative had once more given the soundest of advice. The downpour of ashes ceased abruptly, at the moment when the sun sank into the sea. No mischief was done.

Late at night another phenomenon became visible. The volcano was observed to be in violent eruption. It blazed forth like a gigantic torch held into the heavens. Streams of lava poured down the mountain flanks, reddening sky and sea.

Nepenthe was consoled by the spectacle. The demon had at last found an outlet—a method of

relief. There would be no more showers of ashes. The fact that villages were being overwhelmed under a deluge of flame, vineyards scorched and hundreds of innocent folks, their retreat cut off by fiery torrents, were even then being roasted to death, was no concern of the islanders. It only proved what every one knew: that the jurisdiction of their Patron Saint did not extend to the mainland.

Each of those villages had its own Saint, whose business it was to forestall accidents of this kind. If they failed in their duty through incapacity or mulishness, nothing was easier than to get rid of them; there were others to choose from—dozens of others, waiting for the job! Thinking thus, the islanders gave vent to an immense sigh of relief. They wished long life to their Patron Saint, with whose services they had reason to be satisfied. Their own crops and lives were safe from harm, thanks to the martyr Dodekanus. He loved his people, and they loved him. He was a protector worthy of the name—not like those low-bred bastards across the water.

Chapter XL

Mr. Heard had just finished his early Italian luncheon. Sitting at his coffee and smoking a cigarette, in a mood of considerable contentment, he gazed over the mirror-like surface of the sea towards the volcano, whose pyrotechnical display on the previous evening had kept him awake to a late hour. Yet another glistering day! Each one warmer than the last, and never a change in the wind! Presently he would retire for an hour or two into his cool and darkened bedroom.

One little thing troubled his mind. There had been no reply to the note—a kind of note of enquiry—which he had left at the villa Mon Repos on the preceding day. Though he knew little of his cousin, he could not help feeling anxious. She was all by herself in that lonely little place, suffering—perhaps, and too proud or too shy to complain. Mr. Eames' description of her had made him uneasy. Why should she look as if she had seen a

ghost? What could that signify? The bibliographer was a level-headed person, by no means given to flights of imagination. Imperceptibly, he felt, there had been established an under-current of sympathy between himself and this solitary woman, whom everybody seemed to like. She was different from the ordinary type; the kind of woman whom a man could not help respecting. She contrasted favourably with some of his recent female acquaintances who, however charming or witty, dissatisfied him in this or that particular. His cousin's devotion to child and husband appealed to his heart. She seemed to be perfect of her kind.

Africa had boiled most of the starch out of Mr. Heard. But his acquaintance with some of the saddest and wildest aspects of womanhood only deepened his conviction of the sanctity of the sex. Some called him old-fashioned or quixotic, because he was not altogether in sympathy with modern feministic movements; they called him an idealist, because he had preserved his belief in the sacred mission of women upon earth—his childlike faith in the purity of their souls. They were a humanizing influence, the guardian angels of mankind, the inspirers, the mothers, the protectors of innocence. It pleased him to think that woman had softened harsh dealings between man and man; that every mitigation of savagery, every incitement to worthy or heroic actions, was due to her gentle words, her encouraging example. From the very dawn of history woman had opposed herself to deeds of

violence. What was it Count Caloveglia had said? "Temperance. All the rest is embroidery." How well the old man could put things! Temperance. . . . His cousin, from what he could guess of her character, agreed with that description. Mr. Heard would have maintained against the whole world that a woman, a true woman like this, could do no wrong.

And now he gathered that she was in trouble of some kind. Then why not allow him to help? He had asked for an early reply to his note. Well, perhaps it would arrive by the evening post.

Slightly vexed none the less, he laid down the stump of his cigarette, preparatory to retiring for the hot hours of the day. One owes something to oneself, *n'est-ce pas?* At that moment there was a knock at his door.

Denis entered. His face, shaded under a broad-brimmed hat, was ruddy with the heat. He wore light flannels, and was carrying his jacket on his arm. There was a large parcel in his hand. He looked the picture of health.

Mr. Heard, on rising, gave him a critical glance. He remembered his trip in the boat, and the suicide's rock—that black, ominous cliff; he remembered the thoughts which had passed through his mind at the time. Was this the kind of boy to kill himself? Surely not. Keith must have been mistaken. And Count Caloveglia—was he mistaken too? Evidently. There was nothing tragic about Denis. He was brimming over with life. His troubles, whatever

they were, must have been forgotten.

"I've been lunching with Keith," he began. "He made me tell him a fairy-tale."

"Sit down and have some coffee! You came away very early."

"He told me he wanted to go to sleep after luncheon. And one or two other nice things."

Ah, thought Mr. Heard, Keith was acting up to what he had said in the boat; he was being good to the boy; that was right of him.

"I'm sure," he said, "that Keith has been speaking kindly to you."

"Kindly? It's like talking to an earthquake. He told me to dominate my reflexes. He called me a perambulating echo. He said I was a human amœba—

"Amœba. What's that?"

"A sort of animal that floats about trying to attach itself to something which it can't find."

"I think I see what he means. Anything else?"

"He said I was a chameleon."

"A chameleon!"

"A chameleon that needed the influence of a good woman. Then he gave me this box of Cuban chocolates, to keep me from crying, I suppose. Have one! They're not nearly as nasty as they look."

"Thanks. A chameleon. That is really interesting, as Keith would say. I have seen thousands of them. Outlandish beasts, that anchor themselves by their tails and squint horribly. Let's have a good look at you, Denis. No, I fail to detect any striking resemblance."

"I believe he meant that I take on the colour of other people and have none of my own. Then he told me to go and murder somebody."

"I wouldn't do that, Denis," laughed the bishop. "Murders are so dreadfully vulgar."

"He said it might make a man of me. He forgets that I'm not quite his age."

"You had better not tell him that! Any other advice?"

"Nothing new. He said I made a mistake in paying attention to what human beings said and did, and that I ought to forsake mankind for a while, and art and books and so on. You know the way he talks! He said it would give me a stronger individuality if I came into contact with nature and thought things out for myself instead of listening to other people. He advised me to sit among the rocks at midnight and in the hot afternoons, conversing with the genii of earth and air. It would correct my worldly perspective. I think he may be right, in a way. There is something in it. So I asked him to climb into the hills with me, then and there, in order to get into touch with elemental Powers. He said he thought highly of my character, but as to climbing about in this heat—he said he'd be damned if he would. Those were his very words. He wanted to sleep. He was too old for that sort of thing."

"Very sensible, I'm sure."

"You think so? Because then—then he told me that you were the proper person for an expedition

of that kind. He suggested I should come and see you about it at once—it would allow him time to get his usual afternoon nap. That is why I'm here. So do! It isn't so very hot, once you get used to it. We are sure to see something funny."

"Oh!"

This, thought the bishop, was a pretty example of that doctrine of benevolent egotism which Keith had expounded to him once or twice. A very pretty example!

"He said that?"

Denis nodded.

The notion was distasteful to Mr. Heard. To go out into this torrid sunshine. . . . He, too, was not exactly young; moreover, he was still rather delicate —he needed all the rest he could get. He was looking forward with positive delight to the coming hours in his cool bedroom.

"You really want me to climb to the top of a mountain at this hour of the day and sit there in the heat, waiting for some wretched demon to reveal himself? Aren't you a little too old for that sort of thing? Come now! Does it strike you as a reasonable proposition? With the thermometer at seventy-eight in this room?"

"Keith said you liked nothing better. He said you might take offence if I didn't ask you to come."

He seemed to be disappointed.

There were not many people for whom Mr. Heard would have put himself out just then in that particular way; and Denis, up to a few days ago,

was certainly not one of them. The bishop had never been drawn towards this rather precious youth. He was not Mr. Heard's type of boy. There was a lack of grit and stamina about him—something soft, both in manner and appearance; something dreamy, ambiguous, almost epicene. Mr. Heard had not quite lost his old British instinct as to the fundamental uselessness of all art. A young fellow who, instead of taking up some rational profession, talked about Cimabue and Jacopo Bellini . . . there was something not quite right with him. Jacopo Bellini! But even while thinking what to reply, he was conscious of having undergone a slight change of feeling lately. He was growing more tolerant and benign, even in trifles like this. Jacopo Bellini: why not? Meanwhile, he bethought himself of a way of escape.

"Suppose you go alone? Or why not try the midnight expedition first? I might manage midnight."

"I've tried it."

"Alone?" he laughed. "No success?"

"None whatever," said Denis. And it seemed as if a shadow flitted across his face at these words.

That cloud, that change of tone—what did they portend? Something might be wrong, then, after all. Perhaps Keith had been correct in his diagnosis when he observed that a susceptible mind like this could be shaken out of its equilibrium by the influence of Nepenthe—"capable of anything in this clear pagan light." It was not Mr. Heard's habit

to probe into the feelings of others—as to those of a person like Denis, he did not pretend to understand them. Artistic people! Incalculable! Inconsequential! Irresponsible! Quite another point of view! Yet he could not help thinking of that doleful black rock, with the turquoise-tinted water at its foot. Remembering these things he felt a sudden access of sympathy towards this lonesome fellow-creature. Instead of pursuing the subject of the expedition he asked, quite abruptly:

"Tell me, Denis, are you happy here?"

"How odd that you should come with that question! I had a letter from my mother this morning. She wants to know the same thing. And hanged if I know what to say."

Mr Heard made up his mind.

"Hanged if you know? Then I'll tell you. Write to say that you have met the Bishop of Bampopo, who seems a perfectly respectable old fellow. Uncommonly respectable! Tell her you rather like him. Tell her she can find out all about him in Crockford or the Red Book. Tell her that he will be happy to correspond with her, if she will allow it. Tell her you feel sure he will look after you these last few days, before we all go away. Tell her—oh, everything nice you can think of. You'll do that, won't you? And now I will climb any mountain you like. Where are we going?"

"I have thought of a good place. Rather high up, but well worth it. I feel sure something funny is going to happen today. Don't you notice a kind

of demonic influence in the air?"

"I notice a kind of infernal heat, if that is the same thing. Seventy-eight in this room! You will have to walk slowly. I am not in good condition just yet. Wait a moment. I must take my field-glasses. I never go without them."

Mr. Heard, resigned to his fate, was filled at the same time with anxiety. He could not drive Keith's words out of his head. Perhaps Denis was really up to some mischief. Who could tell? His eagerness —his curious language! The manifest absurdity of the whole enterprise! That note of exaltation in his voice. . . . And what did he mean by saying that something funny would happen? Was he contemplating—? Above all, his dread of being unaccompanied! Mr. Heard was aware that persons of unbalanced mind are apt to experience before some critical outbreak a pathetic terror of solitude, as though, dimly conscious of what was about to happen, they feared to trust themselves alone.

He meant to keep a sharp eye on Denis.

Often, in later times, he recalled that trivial conversation. Every word of it was graven on his memory. How more than strange that Denis should have dragged him away that afternoon, to that particular spot, at that very hour! By what a string of accidents had everything happened. . . .

Chapter XLI

It was nearly two o'clock. To step out of doors was like passing into a furnace. Streets were deserted. The houses showed glaring white against the cobalt of the firmament; their inhabitants lay asleep within, behind closed shutters. Heat and silence brooded over the land.

Climbing slowly aloft by a lava-paved lane they reached the bibliographer's residence and paused awhile near its entrance. Mr. Heard tried to picture the scholar's life in this two-roomed cottage; he regretted having had no chance of visiting that amiable person in his own abode. (Mr. Eames was chary of issuing invitations.) A life of monastic severity. There was a small outhouse attached to one side of the wall; it was the kitchen, Denis explained; Eames' only servant being a boy whom he borrowed for an occasional morning's work from a neighbouring farm which supplied him with dairy produce.

"It isn't often used, that kitchen," said Denis. "He lives mostly on bread and milk. Does his own marketing in the early hours. I met him one day before breakfast, walking with a large brown basket on his arm. Said he was buying anchovies. There was a big haul of them overnight. He had heard about it. A penny a pound, he said. I noticed some lettuce as well. A couple of oranges. Fine chap! He knows what he wants."

The bishop looked over the gate. An air of friendly seclusion reigned in this place. There was no pretence at a garden—not so much as a rose tree or a snapdragon; the vines, of daintiest green but sternly utilitarian, clambered up to the door-lintel, invading the very roof. He pictured to himself the interior. Bare walls and floorings, a print or two, a few trunks and packing cases utilized as seats, a bookshelf, a plain table littered with manuscripts; somewhere, in that further room, a camp bedstead whereon this man of single aim and purpose, this monk of literature, was even then at rest like all sensible folks and dreaming—dreaming, presumably, of foot-notes. Happy mortal! Free from all superfluities and encumbrances of the flesh! Enviable mortal! He reduced earthly existence to its simplest and most effective terms; he owed no man anything; he kept alive, on a miserable income, the sacred flame of enthusiasm. To aspire, that was the secret of life. Thinking thus, Mr. Heard began to understand the bibliographer's feeling for Mrs. Meadows. She lived for her child—he for his

work. They were alike; calm and self-contained, both of them; incapable of illusions, of excess in thought or conduct.

Without the doorway, in a small triangle of shade, sat his fox-terrier, alert, head poised on one side in knowing fashion, ready to bark if the visitors only touched the handle of the gate. Denis remarked:

"He told me that dog was sick the other morning, just like Keith."

"It had probably been eating something. I suppose they generally do," he added thoughtfully. "Otherwise they couldn't be unwell, could they? What a heat, Denis! It's addling my old brains. More slowly, please."

An hour went by. Fatigue was beginning to tell upon Mr. Heard. They had left the cultivated ground behind and were now ascending, by a cindery track of pumicestone, among grotesque blocks of lava and scoriæ that glowed like molten metal. Tufts of flowery broom scented the air. The soil, so recently drenched by the miraculous shower of rain, was once more dry and dusty; its fragile flowers wilted in the sirocco. And still the young man marched ahead. Always upwards! The landscape grew more savage. They bent round a corner and found themselves skirting a precipice. The bishop glanced down in trepidation. There lay the sea, with not a boat in sight. As he continued to look the horizon oscillated; the ground sank under his feet and blue waters seemed to heave

and rise up towards him. He shut his eyes in a fit of dizziness and grasped a rock. Its burning touch revived him.

Then on again. Always upwards.

"Do walk a little more slowly," said the bishop, puffing and wiping his face. "We must be well above the level of the Old Town by this time. A wild scramble. How much higher are we going?"

"Here we are. This is the place I meant."

"Charming, I must say! But aren't we a little too near the the edge of the cliff? It makes me feel funny, as if I were in a balloon."

"Oh, we'll get used to it. Let's sit down, Mr. Heard."

Still distrustful of his companion, the bishop made himself comfortable and glanced around. They were high up; the view embraced half the island. The distant volcano confronting him was wreathed in sullen grey smoke that rose up from its lava torrent, and crowned with a menacing vapour-plume. Then an immensity of sea. At his feet, separated from where he sat by wide stony tracts tremulous with heat, lay the Old Town, its houses nestling in a bower of orchards and vineyards. It looked like a shred of rose-tinted lace thrown upon the landscape. He unravelled those now familiar thoroughfares and traced out, as on a map, the more prominent buildings—the Church, the Municipality, the old Benedictine Monastery where Duke Alfred, they say, condescendingly invited himself to dine with the monks every second

month in such state and splendour that, the rich convent revenues being exhausted, His Highness was pleased to transfer his favours to the neighbouring Carthusians who went bankrupt in their turn; he recognized Count Caloveglia's place and, at the furthest outskirts, the little villa Mon Repos.

Where was she now, his cousin?

Reposing, no doubt, like all sensible folks.

And his eye wandered to the narrow pathway along the precipice where he had walked with her in the evening light—that pathway which he had suggested railing in, by reason of its dangers. A section of the horrible face of the cliff was exposed, showing that ominous coloration, as though splotched with blood, which he had noticed from the boat. The devil's rock! An appropriate name. "Where the young English lord jump over. . . ."

It was the stillest hour of the day. Not a soul in sight. Not a particle of shade. Not a breath of air. A cloudless sky, of inky blueness.

To Mr. Heard's intense relief Denis had settled down, apparently for ever. He lay on his stomach like a lizard, immovable. His head, sheltered by a big hat, rested upon his jacket which he had rolled up into a sort of cushion; one bare sunburnt arm was stretched to its full length on the seared ground. What a child he was, to drag one up to a place like this in the expectation of seeing something unearthly! Mr. Heard was not quite satisfied about him. Perhaps he was only feigning.

Time passed. Do what he would to keep awake,

the bishop felt his eyelids drooping—closing under the deluge of light. Once more there approached him that spirit of malevolence brooding in the tense sunny calm, that baleful emanation which seemed to drain away his powers of will. It laid a weight upon him. He fell into an unquiet slumber.

Presently he woke up and turned sharply to look at his companion. Denis had not stirred an inch from his voluptuous pose. A queer boy. Was he up to some mystification?

The landscape all around was scarred and deserted. How silent a place can be, he thought. An unhealthy hush. And what a heat! The lava blocks —they seemed to smoulder and reel in the fiery glare. It was a deathly world. It reminded him of those illustrations to Dante's *Inferno*. He thought to see the figures of the damned, writhing amid tongues of flame.

His glance fell once more upon the villa of his cousin. Strange! There were two persons, now, walking along the edge of the cliff. Mere specks. . . . He took up his glasses. The specks resolved themselves into the figures of Mrs. Meadows and Mr. Muhlen.

The devil! he thought. What's the meaning of this?

They were moving up and down, at the same spot where he had moved up and down with her. They seemed to be on friendly terms with one another. Excellent terms. It looked as if they were laughing now and then, and stopping occasionally

to glance at something, some book or other object, which the lady carried in her hand. The devil! At times his cousin seemed to be dangerously near the edge—he caught his breath, remembering that sensation of giddiness, of gulping terror, with which he had watched the falcon swaying crazily over the abyss. She was enjoying it, to all appearances. Then, as they retraced their steps, it was the man's turn to take the outside of the path. He suffered as little as she did, evidently, from vertigo. Laughing, and gesticulating. The devil! What were they talking about? What were they doing there, at this impossible hour of the day? Five or six times they went to and fro; and then, suddenly, something happened before Mr. Heard's eyes—something unbelievable.

He dropped his glasses, but quickly raised them again. There was no doubt about it. Muhlen was no longer there. He had disappeared. Mrs. Meadows was walking down towards her villa, in sprightly fashion, alone.

Mr. Heard felt sick. Not knowing exactly what he was about, he began to shake Denis with needless violence. The young man turned round lazily, flushed in the face.

"Where—what——" he began. "Rather funny! You saw it too? Oh, Lord! You've woke me up. What a bother. . . . Why, Mr. Heard, what's the matter with you? Aren't you feeling well?"

The bishop pulled himself together, savagely.

"Touch of the sun, I daresay. Africa, you know!

Perhaps we ought to be going. Give me your arm, Denis, like a good boy. I want to get down."

He was dazed in mind, and his steps faltered. But his brain was sufficiently clear to realize that he was face to face with an atrocious and carefully planned murder.

Chapter XLII

All the traditions of his race, the uprightness of ages of decent law-abiding culture, the horror of the pure for what is impure, rebelled against this thing which nothing but the testimony of his own eyes could have made him believe. He felt humiliated, as though he had received a blow; inclined to slink about and hide his face from other men. There was contamination in the mere fact of having been a witness. Oh, it was villainous. How carefully the hour and place had been chosen!

And he himself, during that evening walk, had given her the idea. He had said how easily a man could be thrown over at that spot. Very simple. . . .

His mind would clear up, maybe, in course of time. Meanwhile he remembered about Retlow—*alias* Muhlen. It came to him in a flash. The man was his cousin's first husband; possibly her only legal husband, seeing that she may not have been able to secure sufficient evidence against him to

justify a divorce—had, indeed, lost sight of the scoundrel altogether for several years prior to her elopement with young Meadows. It might well be that Muhlen had heard somehow or other of her presence on Nepenthe, and gone there for the purpose of renewing acquaintance with her. But this foul crime! For it cannot have been a sudden impulse on her part. She had been playing with him —leading him on. His visits to the Old Town, at that quiet hour of the day. . . . No. She had carried out her infamous plan after ample premeditation.

Mr. Heard stayed at home, burdened with a hideous secret. Practical questions began to assail him. What should he do? Wait! he concluded. Something would be sure to turn up. He was too dazed to think clearly, as yet. He also disliked that fellow. But one does not murder a man because one happens to dislike him. One does not murder a man . . . foolish words, that kept on repeating themselves in his mind.

To pardon—yes. Mr. Heard could pardon to any extent. The act of pardoning: what did it imply? Nothing more than that poor deluded mortals were ever in need of sympathy and guidance. Anybody could pardon. To pardon was not enough for a man of Mr. Heard's ruthless integrity. He must understand. How understand, how interpret, a dastardly deed like this? What could her motives have been? Of what act or proposal could the man have been guilty to merit, even in her eyes, a fate such as this? For evidently, one does not murder a man

because one happens to dislike him——

Denis came to enquire, in the course of the morning. He was anxious to know how the bishop was feeling after yesterday's attack of sunstroke.

"I have been blaming myself bitterly for dragging you out," he began. "I—really——"

"Don't think about it! I shall be better soon. I'll remain indoors to-day."

"You are not looking quite yourself just yet. What a fool I was! I can't tell you how sorry I am."

"Not worth talking about. You'll stay to luncheon?"

The news of Muhlen's disappearance was spread about that same evening, and created no surprise whatever. Foreigners had a knack of coming to the island and mysteriously vanishing again; it was quite the regular thing to run up accounts all round and then clear out. Hotel-keepers, aware of this idiosyncrasy on the part of distinguished guests, arranged their scale of charges accordingly; they made the prices so high that the honest paid for the dishonest, as with English tailors. The other tradespeople of the place—the smiling confectioner, the simple-minded bootmaker and good-natured stationer, the ever-polite hosier—they all worked on the same principle. They recouped themselves by fleecing the more ingenuous of their clients.

In the case of Muhlen's occultation there was even less surprise than usual. Everybody, judging by his lavish display of gold and showy manner, expected him to depart sooner or later in the ortho-

dox manner—at night-time, by means of a sailing boat secretly hired, conscientiously prepaid. His more intimate friends, the Magistrate and the Commissioner, were less surprised than anyone else. True, Signor Malipizzo was somewhat hurt, because Muhlen had practically invited him to stay at his own native town where every kind of amusement was to be had, the female society being of the choicest. Exuberant women—and rich! It would have been a pleasant change after the trim but tedious gardens of Salsomaggiore. He had strong hopes, however, of receiving a letter from some safe place outside the dominions, making an appointment for the holidays. For form's sake, of course, he promptly initiated the ordinary judicial enquiries. It would look well in the records of the Court.

As for Mr. Parker, who was brooding in the retirement of his villa whither the news had swiftly spread, he merely thought:

"Got off scot free. And without paying his Club account, I'll bet. Bolted. Lucky devil. That's where the casual visitor has the pull over a resident official like myself. Cleared out! I'm glad I never had any money to lend him. Touched a good few of them, I'll be bound."

Within an hour or so the Magistrate's formal enquiries led to a startling discovery. Muhlen's room in the hotel was broken open, and his property searched. No letters could be found conveying any clue as to his whereabouts. But—what was almost incredible—there was loose money lying about. A

more minute investigation proved that the gentleman had dressed himself with considerable care prior to leaving the establishment for the last time. He had changed his socks and other underwear—yes, he had donned a clean shirt. The old one, blue-striped, which he had been seen to wear at breakfast, was lying negligently across the back of a chair with a pair of costly enamelled links, of azure colour to match, in the cuffs. Moreover, in a small box hidden beneath some collars in a drawer were found a few foreign bank-notes, a ring or two, and a handful of gold coins such as he was in the habit of carrying about his person. The judge, who superintended the researches, caused these valuables to be impounded, sealed, and deposited in the Court of Justice.

The discovery put a fresh and ominous complexion on the affair. When a man means to bolt, he does not leave portable jewelry—an enamelled pair of links—behind him. And even if, in the hurry and scurry of departure, he does overlook such elegant trifles, he never forgets to take his money; least of all a man like Muhlen.

A lengthy deposition was signed by the hotel proprietor. It set forth, in reference to Muhlen's general habits, that this gentleman had hitherto not attended to his account; he had not been urgently pressed for a settlement. One did not like to incommode foreign visitors with bills; it annoyed them so much that they sometimes migrated to other hotels and made debts there, debts which in

certain unexpected cases were liquidated in full while the former and equally legitimate ones remained unpaid—which was disheartening. In regard to his recent mode of life, the document contained the suggestive fact that Muhlen had not taken his midday meal at the hotel for some time past. He was strangely fond of going out in the late mornings, the proprietor averred; it might be, to bathe; he returned at about five in the afternoon after lunching, presumably, in some small restaurant by the shore.

This declaration, signed by a respected citizen, soon leaked into publicity. Taken in conjunction with the discovery of his money it was an eye-opener to the whole community, and to nobody more than to the judge himself. Signor Malipizzo argued, with his usual penetration, that Muhlen had intended to return to his quarters as he had always done of late. The *animus revertendi* was abundantly proven by the sleeve-links and loose cash. He had not returned. Ergo, he had been prevented from returning. A man is prevented if something untoward happens to him. Ergo, something untoward had happened. Untoward things may be divided, for the sake of convenience, into two main classes, sections, or categories:

1. Accidents.
2. Foul play.

Which was it?

Signor Malipizzo dismissed as untenable the hypothesis of a clandestine withdrawal from local

creditors. By way of clearing up the last vestige of doubt, however, and also for the sake of appearances (seeing that a wise magistrate is supposed to take nothing for granted) he called for depositions from the sailors and fishermen. It was a superfluous piece of work, a pure formality; he knew beforehand what they would say. They always said the same thing. They said it. Interrogated on oath they declared, one and all, that no person answering to the description of Muhlen had appeared on the beach for a long time; not for the last eight months and twelve days, to be quite accurate; much less had such a one engaged a vessel. The jovial but conservative sea-folk never varied their utterance on those many solemn occasions when a foreigner, for the purpose of evaporating, paid in advance for the hire of a boat, or was supposed to have done so. Albeit even ignorant people attached no significance to this statement, it went for what it was worth as cumulative evidence.

The sight of that loose cash would have been quite enough for a man of Signor Malipizzo's discernment. Muhlen had not bolted. Nor was he the kind of man to lose his life by an accident. Not he! Muhlen was careful of his skin. Ergo, his disappearance was due to something which came under the second class, section, or category. He had been done away with.

The Magistrate, thinking of those summer holidays, began to be really vexed; so did Mr. Parker, who soon learned the result of these enquiries and

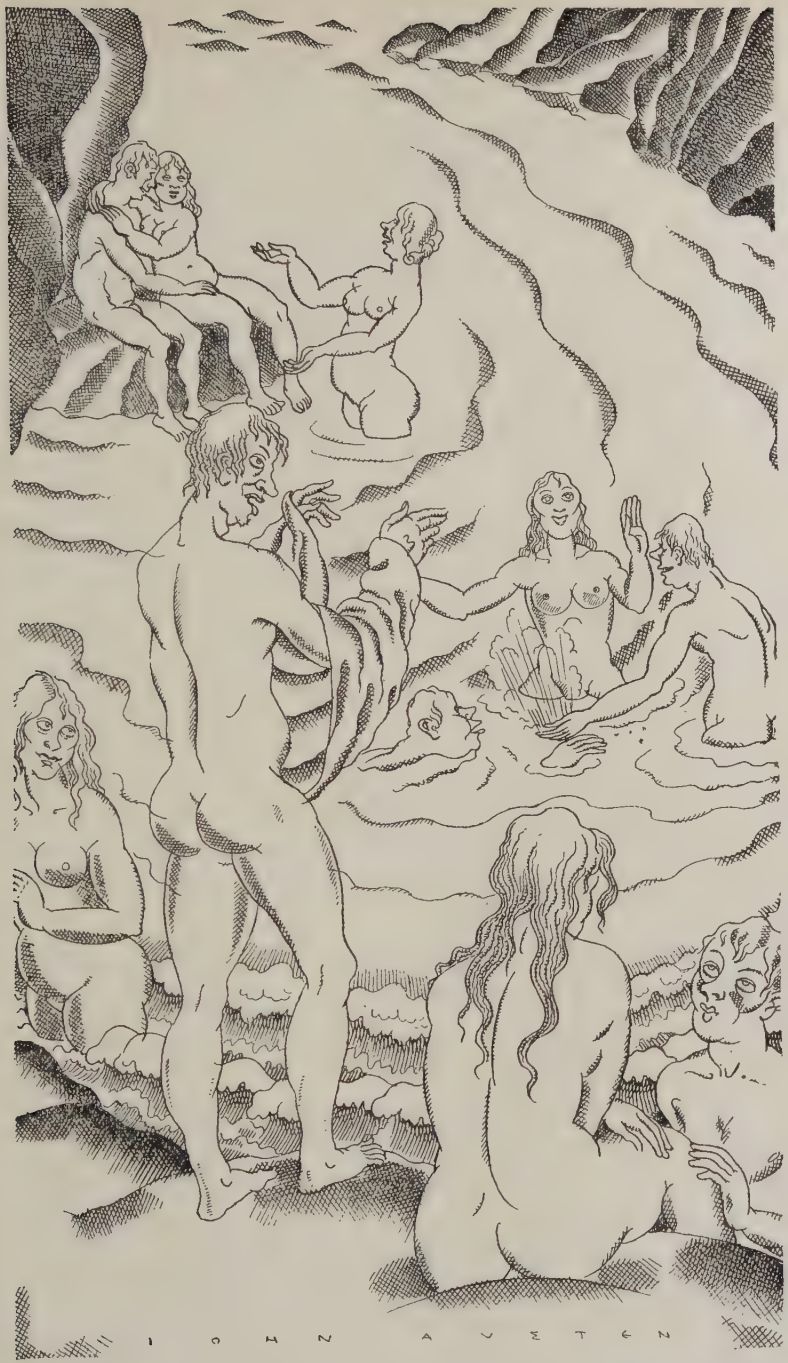
regretted that his mourning retirement prevented him from issuing forth and telling everybody what he thought of this new disgraceful scandal. His English blood revolted at the idea of a harmless tourist, a prominent member of the Alpha and Omega Club, being callously murdered. Would these people never get civilized? He was glad to hear, at all events, that the judge was doing something.

Signor Malipizzo was doing a good deal. He meant to sift the thing to the bottom. His energy, hitherto simulated, was now set genuinely at work to discover indications of the murderer—indications of his missing friend. But Nepenthe is not a good place for finding corpses. The island is full of fathomless rents and fissures. A good many foreigners, especially such as were known to carry loose gold in their pockets, had been suspected of falling into them without leaving a trace behind. Yet a thorough search was instituted, for he knew that criminals were not always as clever as they thought themselves; some insignificant relic might turn up —a shred of clothing or so forth. Such things were occasionally picked up on Nepenthe; nobody knew to whom they belonged. The Cave of Mercury, on being searched, yielded nothing but a trouser button, apparently of English manufacture. Enquiries were also made as to when the ill-starred gentleman had last been seen, and where. Finally, the judge drew up a list, a fairly long list, of all the suspicious characters on the place with a view

to placing them under lock and key, in expectation of further developments. Such was the customary procedure; one must assume the worst. If innocent, they might of course regain their liberty in a year or two.

It stands to reason that a good many people had noticed Muhlen on the morning of his disappearance. One cannot walk about Nepenthe at that hour of the day without being seen, and Muhlen was sufficiently conspicuous. But everyone knew what was in store for him if he admitted such a fact, to wit, an application of paragraph 43 of the 92nd section of the Code of Criminal Procedure, according to which any and every witness of this kind is liable to be segregated from his family and kept under arrest for an indefinite length of time, pending the instruction of a trial which might take half a century. Nobody, therefore, was fool enough to admit having encountered him—nobody save a half-witted youth who fatuously confided to a policeman that he had met the gentleman somewhere in the neighbourhood of the bibliographer's villa about the hour of midday. Under ordinary circumstances Signor Malipizzo would have been delighted to lay sacrilegious hands on Mr. Eames, whose olympic aloofness had always annoyed him and against whom a case could now be got up, on the strength of these indications. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of his villa—that was quite sufficient to warrant an arrest.

The boy in question happened to be a relation


JOHN AVETON

of his arch-enemy, the parish priest. Better still. Chuckling at the happy coincidence, he forgot all about Mr. Eames, and gave orders for the other to be conveyed to the guard-house, searched, and interrogated, arguing plausibly that a person of his mental instability would be sure to give himself away by some stupid remark.

Things turned out better than he had dared to hope. Under the prisoner's clothing was discovered a gold coin of foreign nationality attached, by a piece of string, round his neck. For all one knew, it might have been Muhlen's. The interrogating carbineer who is invested, during such preliminary enquiries, with quasi-judicial functions—being permitted to assume the rôle of prosecuting or defending counsel, or to remain sternly unbiassed, as he feels inclined—desired to learn how he had come by this jewel.

He received it long ago from his mother, he said, as a talisman against the moonsickness which had tormented him in childhood. Replying, in stammering and dazed fashion, to further questions, he gave it to be understood that nobody had ever set eyes on the coin in question; he was afraid of showing it, lest someone should take it from him by force. He loved the coin. He got it from his mother.

"Ah!" said the friendly policeman. "And your mother, now—could she perhaps tell us when she gave it to you?"

"My mother is in Paradise."

"Dead, is she? H'm. That looks queer, my young

friend. Very fishy. You should be more careful in little things like that. She ought to have been kept alive, you know. Anybody can say they had gold coins given them by dead mothers, don't you see? Rather a thin trick. Can't you suggest something better? Cheer up, boy! You needn't tremble all over. Look, I am writing it down, and you must put your name to it afterwards. Think a little. A living uncle, for instance—if he came into Court and testified that he had given you the coin, why, it might make all the difference and get you out of a nasty scrape. Surely you've got an uncle or something? How about His Reverence the *parroco?* Couldn't he swear——?"

"My mother is in Paradise."

"In Paradise, is she? That's where you ought to be, my son. Just sign this declaration, please. Then perhaps you will meet your mother sooner than you expect. Can't read or write? Well, put your cross to it and may the Madonna help you! For I can't. I've done my best to be impartial, but God alone can steer a fool. He makes a specialty of it, they tell me. If so, you've got a sporting chance. . . ."

Chapter XLIII

Overjoyed with this incriminating deposition, His Worship gave orders for the prisoner's formal arrest. Aloud he remarked:

"What have I always said? Beware of simple folks. They are the deep ones. Their naïveté is nothing but a disguise. Here we have a case in point. This boy, from all accounts, is the pure type of the callous murderer. He stutters. He makes uncalled-for gurglings of a bestial nature. He has pendulous ears, and certain other stigmata of degeneration which are familiar to all conversant with criminal anthropology. Of course he denies everything. But mark my words! After six or seven months, when the prison diet begins to take effect, he will confess. I know the species; it is all too common. Meanwhile we must congratulate ourselves on having tracked down the culprit so soon."

To condemn for homicide the cousin of a Catho-

lic priest warmed the cockles of his free-thinking heart. In fact, on second thoughts, it was better than if he had caught the real murderer who might have turned out to be an atheist, which would have been bad enough—or possibly a freemason, which would have been really awkward. The news spread rapidly over the island, and caused wild rejoicings among the anti-clericals.

The rejoicings were of brief duration.

Torquemada, as usual, was in fighting trim. Like all God-fearing ascetics, he was a man-eater at heart. He made up his mind long ago to eat the judge, whom he considered an offence to Heaven and earth—the official mouthpiece of the devil. Up to the present he had bided his time, waiting for a good opportunity. The time was now ripe.

Not that he greatly loved his cousin. The family to which the unhappy youth belonged was of no credit or use to himself, and this particular member was worse than useless, being afflicted with an unpardonable vice—lack of judgment. His stupidity had already got him into a number of minor scrapes. As a child he annoyed foreigners by ingenious requests for money, stole flowers from neighbours' gardens because they were so irresistibly pretty, tied saucepans to their cats because they had such irresistibly long tails and made such irresistibly droll movements and noises in order to get rid of them, frightened old ladies by making faces at them; sometimes, by way of a change, he threw off a fit; later on, he had taken to smashing crockery,

mooning about the vineyards, forgetting errands entrusted to him, throwing stones at passing carriages and making a general nuisance of himself. The *parroco* knew that he had been dismissed as incompetent by tradespeople to whom he was apprenticed, by farmers who had employed him as a labourer. He could not even repeat his Ave Maria without producing sinister crepitations from his gullet. And now he had crowned all by this surpassing act of imprudence. If he had only kept his mouth shut, like everybody else. But there! What could you expect from a fool?

A genuine murderer—it was most irreligious, of course. Still, some homicides were fairly justifiable, others almost meritorious; and a criminal of this kind showed, in every case, undeniable traces of manliness; one could not help respecting him in an oblique sort of fashion. But a fool! Torquemada, the zealous priest, the man of God, could never quite repress the promptings of his blood. He had all the fanatic's appreciation of violent methods; all the southerner's fondness for a miscreant, and contempt for a simpleton. A mere fool —what's the use of him on earth? Had the culprit been any ordinary Christian, His Reverence would not have dreamt of interfering; gladly would he have let him spend the remainder of his days in prison which everybody knew to be the best place for stupid people—it kept them out of mischief.

But this was not an ordinary Christian. He was a relation. A relation! That meant that one must

show fight for him, if only for the sake of public appearances.

He held a hurried council with his family and, half an hour later, a second one with the more influential members of the priesthood. It was decided, in both cases, that the occasion was favourable for a long-deferred contest between the Powers of Light and the Powers of Darkness, the Catholic Church and modernism, the Clergy of Nepenthe and the secular authority of law and order as personified by that judge in whom all evil, public and private, flowed together. A noble parting cheque which he had just received from Mr. van Koppen for some urgent repairs to the parish organ came in handy. It would enable him to face the adversary with good hopes of success. To his friends he said:

"An insult to my family! I shall not take it lying down. Let them see what a humble servant of God can do."

So saying, he girded his loins for the fray, walked in person to the post office and wrote out a lengthy telegram to the redoubtable Don Giustino Morena, the parliamentary representative of Nepenthe who, as readers of the newspapers were aware, happened to be taking a brief holiday among his own people in the south. It was a judiciously flattering dispatch. It prayed the famous lawyer-politician to undertake the defence of a relation, an orphan, a mere child, unjustly accused of murder and arbitrarily imprisoned, and to deign to accept a pitiful honor-

arium of five thousand francs—the largest sum which a parish priest, poor but jealous of the honour of his family, could scrape together. If the great man accepted the offer, he might arrive by the next day's boat. There was a chance, thought the *parroco,* of his doing so. Don Giustino was an ardent Catholic; he might be favourably impressed by the modest petition of a clergyman in his constituency. He had promised over and over again to visit his Nepenthean constituents. He would now be killing two birds with one stone.

Five minutes, under ordinary circumstances, were wont to elapse ere an item of private news could percolate out of the post office and become public property. Such was the portentous import of this message that it did not percolate at all. It flashed, and produced forthwith a feeling of joyous elation at the prospect of lively events in the near future —of a battle between the Vatican and the Quirinal. Coming on the top of Muhlen's murder—which was a decided improvement upon his alleged flight —it caused the citizens to talk in excited and almost random fashion about what was coming next. Alone, the members of the Alpha and Omega Club, thanks to the benign influence of Parker's poison, received the successive waves of information with composure, and preserved from beginning to end their sense of proportion.

"Heard the news? Muhlen's bolted."

"I thought he would."

"They say he owes a good deal."

"Obviously. Else he wouldn't have bolted. Good riddance, anyhow."

"That's what I say. But he owes me a lot of whiskies, the blighter."

"You're lucky. Gone off with thirty francs of mine."

"Damn his eyes. I expect we're not the only ones."

"Not by a long chalk. Come and have a drink...."

"Heard the news? Muhlen's murdered."

"Serves him bloody well right. The blackguard owes me two francs fifty. I'll bet it was some money business."

"Not a bit of it. A little girl, you know. Got a knife in the stomach. About eleven at night, from all accounts. They heard him squealing a mile off."

"I don't believe it. He was not that kind."

"Not that kind? What do you mean?"

"Not that kind."

"Not *that* kind? Really? Go on. You don't say so, by Jove. What makes you think it?"

"Think? I don't think. I happen to know. You pay for my peg and I'll tell you all about it. . . ."

"Heard the news? Don Giustino's coming over."

"The old assassin. What of it?"

"Good business! One in the eye for Mali—what's his name. There'll be the hell of a row. We ought to be grateful to Muhlen for this amusement."

"Damned if we ought. Unless he got himself killed on purpose to amuse us. And even then it

would have amused me more if he had paid me back those seventeen francs."

"You're very hard to please to-day."

"So would you be, if you'd been as raddled as I was last night. You ought to see the inside of my head, you ought. There's room for a coal barge, in there."

"That's easily remedied. Toss up for drinks."

"Don't mind if I do. . . ."

Signor Malipizzo heard the news as he was sitting down to luncheon. At first he thought the priest had gone crazy. Don Giustino—good God! Five thousand francs. Where had he found the money? Then he remembered hearing about old Koppen's cheque for the organ. Those confounded foreigners, always mixing themselves up in local concerns! If the *parroco* were really poor, as these hypocrites of Christians professed to be, he could never have run to it. Don Giustino. What an awful turn of events. And all because Muhlen got himself murdered. These confounded foreigners!

His heart sank within him. He had looked forward to keeping the priest's cousin for a year or two in gaol, previous to his trial. That would have to be altered. If Don Giustino came, the proceedings must be fixed for next morning—it was the merest act of courtesy towards a man of his standing, a man whom one must conciliate at any cost. He blamed himself for arresting that young idiot. It threatened to bring him into undesired prominence. Hitherto, by reason of his sheer insig-

nificance, he had escaped the great Catholic deputy's eye. As Magistrate of Nepenthe, who cared what political or religious views he professed or in what manner he administered the law? All this was now changed. He was in the limelight. It might end—who knows where? He had other enemies on the island besides the clericals; the arrival of Don Giustino might lead to a general revision of his judicial labours. To-morrow perhaps he would have to confront the monster. Don Giustino! He knew him by reputation. A camorrista of the blackest dye. He took no chances. He never threatened; he performed. Everybody knew that Signor Malipizzo did not like the prospect of losing his lucrative job. Still less did he fancy the notion of receiving a charge of buck-shot in his liver, one evening from behind a wall. That was Don Giustino's cheerful way with people who annoyed him. Those infernal clericals; their sanguinary, out-of-date methods! Papacy and camorra—interconvertible terms—who could plumb their depths? The Masons were different. They fought for the enlightenment of a people deluded by priestly snares and intimidated by the threats of assassins. Don Giustino. Holy Mother of God! What would to-morrow bring?

Thinking thus, the judge eyed his victuals resentfully. His appetite was gone—he was beginning to feel sick. Suddenly he pushed his plate away from him and hobbled out of the room, even forgetting to finish his wine. He limped across the

broiling market-place to give the necessary orders to his faithful and experienced clerk who, having likewise got wind of that telegram, was not unprepared for some change of mind on the part of his chief.

"The young idiot must come up for trial tomorrow, if the assassin arrives."

"A sound suggestion," the grey-haired one replied. "It will take the wind out of his sails. It will prove——"

"Of course it will. And now, Don Carlo, go and take your little nap. I will stay here, to put my papers in order. May your dreams be happy!"

The judge was dowered with extreme irascibility of temper, due to his chronic valetudinarian condition. He, too—within the limits of propriety—was not going to take things lying down. So much was certain. At first he was too agitated to be able to collect his thoughts. Gradually, as he moved about those rooms, calmness and confidence returned. He was alone. It was very warm and quiet here, amid these scenes of his many little triumphs. The look of the archives, the familiar smell of the place, was reassuring. He began to feel at ease once more. Ideas came to him.

"They will say I locked him up on account of his clerical connections. That will never do. I must have non-clerical suspects under arrest, in order to prove that I am impartial and only desirous of eliciting the truth. Whom could we catch? The Russians! They have proved themselves law-breakers and

criminals. The Russians! Suspicious characters. Their recent behaviour is quite sufficient for my purpose."

He signed warrants for the arrest of the Messiah, Krasnojabkin and some fifteen others of those who had escaped his wrath on the previous occasion. They would be under lock and key within two hours. Don Giustino would never interfere on behalf of these aliens. Nor would any one else. An inspiration! It would proclaim his zeal for the public order—his official independence of mind.

And—yes. There was one other little thing.

He hobbled to where the various *pièces justificatives* were lying in their sealed envelopes. He took up the receptacle containing the gold talisman which had been sequestrated from the priest's nephew, and broke it open. It could always be sealed up again. The coin, attached to its string, fell out; it was an old-fashioned medal—Spanish, apparently. He fingered it awhile. Then, opening the packet which held Muhlen's gold, he carefully examined the contents. Five or six of these coins were of the same kind. French Napoleons. That was lucky. Any stick was good enough to beat a dog with. This was a particularly good stick. He bored a hole through one of the Napoleons and placed it on the culprit's string, after removing the original talisman, which he bestowed in his own pocket. That done, he sealed up the two parcels again, conscientiously.

"There!" he said. "He laughs best who laughs

last. Don Giustino is a clever man. But the devil himself could not prove the prisoner innocent, in the face of evidence like this. Down with the Pope!"

Never had he felt so enlightened, so gloriously free-masonish.

Chapter XLIV

The Commendator Giustino Morena—familiarly known as Don Giustino or, by his enemies, as "the assassin"—was a southerner by birth, a city product. From low surroundings he had risen to be a prominent member of the Chamber of Deputies and one of the most impressive figures in the country.

As a child he was apprenticed to a cobbler. There, bending over his work on the pavement outside the shop-door, his blue eyes and curly fair hair, his rosy cheeks, his winning smile, his precocious retorts, attracted the most favourable comment from the passers-by and secured him an unfailing supply of chocolates and cigarettes. People liked him so much that he quickly learned not only how to mend shoes but a good many other things which they were anxious to teach him. His grown-up friends vied with one another for a place in his affections and a certain scandalous affair with knives, which some-

how or other got into the daily press where it had no business to be, put the seal on his reputation in the quarter.

"That boy will go far!" the old men and women used to say. "Only look at his blue eyes. Blessed the mother that bore him, whoever she was"—for nobody even pretended to know.

They were right; as old folks are apt to be. The victor in the disreputable affray happened to be a gentleman of middle age, a distinguished ornament of the Black Hand. No happier fate could have been devised for Giustino than to live under the patronage of such an individual. He took charge of the little fellow, and was not slow in discovering that his protégé possessed not only a muscular framework and ready wit, but the malice, the concentrated ruthlessness and rapacity of fifty devils rolled into one. Something could be made out of that boy, he concluded; the Society, always ready to adopt promising neophytes on the recommendation of a qualified practitioner like himself, would doubtless enroll him in due course. Meanwhile he instructed him, by precept and example, how to be religious in the manner most pleasing to the Madonna. He narrated the Lives of the Saints, forced him to attend Mass and confess himself to one of the Society's trusted priests and taught him, above all things, to hate the Government because it oppressed the Pope and the poor. One day he said:

"You must now attend evening classes. I think you will do well at our school of the Holy Cross.

Your outfit is exceptional. Among other things you have the great advantage that the first and second fingers of both your hands are of equal length. That augurs well! God has favoured you, for many lads have to lengthen the first one artificially, which is apt to weaken the joints."

The Master and Director drew good salaries from the numerous pupils at this institution. Everything useful to young boys was taught here save only religion. Seeing that all the scholars were drawn from families distinguished for their piety and adherence to the Pope, the Director considered a religious training to be superfluous—his pupils learnt these things on their mother's knees. Giustino soon acquired the jargon; he passed his examination in the fifteen articles, in secrecy, swiftness of foot and nimbleness of hand. The latter was taught on a clothed wooden figure out of whose pockets the students were obliged to extract handkerchiefs, gold watches and jewelry with such dexterity that not one of the little bells, which dangled from its hat, gave forth the slightest sound; that stage passed, the art was practised on the person of the Director himself who, walking through the streets as an ordinary citizen, was supposed to have his pockets picked in the approved professional manner. Those who failed to come up to the standard were thrashed savagely three or four times; if they still failed, they were sent back to their parents with a polite recommendation that they should be taught some other trade. Giustino was seldom punished. On

the contrary, the Director was so enamoured of his progress and blue eyes that he entered him as a fox long before the regular three years' course was up, and offered to tattoo the symbol of proficiency, a cross, on the back of his right hand.

The patron, while proud of his young friend, did not intend to spoil his chances in after life by an indelible bodily mark of this kind, however honourably attained. He had other designs for him. To pass the next year or two, he made arrangements for Giustino, now grown lean and wolfish, to be officially received into the Black Hand. As probationer he was the delight of his superiors; he went through the various tests with phenomenal rapidity and gave abundant proofs of manliness. At the age of sixteen he had already killed three men—one of them being a policeman who was suspected of infidelity towards the Society. It was then that the protector, who was no fool, spake to him a second time, saying:

"As you know, my son, I can neither read nor write. Those were not considered respectable accomplishments, in my day, for a lad of spirit or a man of honour. Devil's work! But we live in an effeminate age. Virtue is at a discount. The wise man, while observing these things with regret, adapts himself to them. He marches with the times. They call us reactionaries. It depends upon boys like you to show the world what reactionaries are good for. The whole town has already learnt to respect your manly instincts. You must now go

further and learn to read and write. You will then enter the University. There you will study law and politics. You will then enter Parliament. There you will represent our cause. The means—the money? Trust the Society! Only be a credit to your friends, defend the poor, and never forget to say your prayers. Then the good God will reward your efforts."

This is precisely what the good God did. Within a short space of time the young deputy had made a name for himself; he was recognized as one of the few representatives of the Black Hand whose word could be implicitly relied upon. He had a share in everything; commissions and percentages poured in upon him. After making an example of half a dozen tiresome persons by having them quietly stabbed or shot—nothing was ever proved against him though everybody knew it was his work—he experienced no further opposition in his political career. Morena never threatens, they said; he performs. A safe man! From a timorous Liberal Government, his avowed enemies, he extorted the title of Commendatore; not because he attached any value to such outward distinctions but because, like a true Camorrista, he never lost an opportunity of showing that he could do what he pleased with everybody, Government included. It was an open secret that the next vacant portfolio of Justice would be at his disposal. All this, of course, was years and years ago.

To these arts of statecraft he added a quite un-

usual legal acumen and forensic ability. For the last fifteen years he had been in receipt of large annual retaining fees from the principal commercial firms of the country; that of one shipping company alone amounted to fifty thousand francs. They found it worth their while since, without doing a stroke of work for them, he gave his tacit support to their most nefarious undertakings. A useful man! As a lawyer in private cases his reputation was tremendous. Judges and juries had been known to faint with emotion at his dramatic gestures, his fiery eloquence. He could pull anybody out of a scrape. Wherever he spoke the Court was crowded to listen to his impassioned arguments, to look upon the cold fire of his blue eyes, his carefully adjusted dress, his fair hair turning to grey, his smooth face which he kept shaven for no other reason—so he used to declare—than because he reverenced the fashions of the old papal régime. "Just like an Englishman," people said.

He had lately put on flesh; it inspired confidence. Moreover he never married; that also was something out of the common—it pointed to independence, to lack of ordinary human frailties. In short, he was so perfect a compound of vice and intelligence that even his dearest friends could not put their finger on the exact spot where the one began and the other ended. And the whole of this unique mixture was placed at the disposal of the Vatican. Don Giustino was the implacable enemy of modernism, a living disproof of the vulgar assertion that

freemasonry is the sole key to success in modern Italy. A formidable man! And growing more formidable every day, as his wealth increased. His income was already such that he could afford to be honest; nothing but the force of old habits kept him from developing into a positive saint.

It stands to reason that a person of this calibre would have sniffed at a paltry remuneration of five thousand francs offered by an obscure country priest. But Don Giustino was a good son of the Church. He had never forgotten the recommendation of his old patron to succour the humble and distressed; he specialized, as a lawyer, in defending murderers and rescuing them from the secular arm. They were enthusiasts suffering under a sense of wrong; they belonged to the class of the honest poor; they were victims of governmental greed and social injustice. Motives, not deeds! he would say. And the motives of the poor must be judged by other standards than those of the rich. They have other lives, other temptations. Trust the people. The people, under proper guidance of the priests....

Although it was hardly likely that the great man would deign to accept Torquemada's invitation, yet half the town was assembled at the harbour to await the arrival of the evening boat and catch a glimpse, if possible, of the famous Camorrista. And there he was! He leaned over the taffrail, easily recognizable from his pictures in the illustrated papers. He was dressed in a felt hat, brown boots, and light grey clothes—just like anybody else. Pre-

sently he descended to the quay, followed by a tall and solid-looking young valet. He was wreathed in smiles. A whiff of political life, of busy deeds in the capital, exhaled from his person. The Mayor of Nepenthe, a devout Catholic, deferentially shook hands and introduced the *parroco* and other notabilities. They drove up together. It was all delightfully breezy and informal. But men were aware that in this little episode there lurked more than met the eye; that the arrival of Commendatore Morena was an occasion worthy to be chronicled in the annals of the island. Not only was it his first appearance as deputy among his constituents. That alone would have been an event. The avowed purpose of his visit, to rescue a criminal from the properly constituted authorities, gave it the character of a pro-Vatican demonstration—a slap in the face of King and Constitution.

An intimate little dinner had been arranged by the parish priest in order to give the principal clergy and a few favoured laymen of their party an opportunity of paying their respects. No one knew what took place at this repast save that the distinguished guest was in wonderful humour; he joked and laughed and told funny stories; he was enchanted with the wine and the excellent local crayfish and announced his intention of buying a little villa wherein to spend the evening of his days, after his public labours were over. An ideal spot! Lucky people, he called them. It was most unfortunate that he would be obliged to leave by to-

morrow's midday boat, and so miss the greater part of the festival of Saint Eulalia.

Another little item of news was allowed to filter out and be sedulously propagated, to the effect that the Commendatore had refused, politely but firmly, to accept any remuneration for his services. Such a thing could not be thought of! Pleasure and duty rarely coincided as in this case, where it was both a pleasure to come to this charming island and a duty to say a few words in Court about this unfortunate young man—to defend the oppressed to the utmost of his miserable ability, and thereby approve himself a good son of the Church.

"Your servant in everything!" he added. "And if you would now accept from me a humble donation of one thousand francs to be distributed, as His Reverence thinks best, among the needy poor of Nepenthe, you would indeed make me your debtor for life!"

Such was the great man's speech, as reported. It was a pure invention on the part of Torquemada who, being a high-principled ecclesiastic, had clear-cut orthodox views anent the utility of pious legends. He knew it would sound well among the populace. He hoped it would vex the envious Magistrate into a fit of the colic. He argued that the great man himself, in the event of its coming to his ears, would not be otherwise than gratified by a godly fable so strictly in keeping with his character.

Don Francesco alone, the smiling terrestrial beast, the lover of wine and women, held aloof from the

entertainment, alleging a gastric indisposition and doctor's orders. He did not see eye to eye with Torquemada on matters such as these. Don Francesco disliked all measures of violence, camorra or freemasonry, Vatican or Quirinal—disliked them so much that he would have hated them had he been built, like the *parroco,* on hating lines. He was too unwieldy, too fond of life, too indulgent towards himself and others to experience at mention of Don Giustino's name anything but a certain feeling of discomfort—a feeling which his acute intelligence, embedded under those rolls of fat, enabled him to formulate with warmth and precision.

"I know quite well," he said to Torquemada, "that he calls himself a good son of the Church. So much the worse for the Church. I understand he is a prominent member of the Government. So much the worse for the Government. And I realize that, but for his intervention, this harmless individual might spend the remainder of his life in prison. So much the worse for all of us, who derive justice from so tainted a source. As to dining at the same table with him—no. Does not the whole world know his history? The animal! He would make me vomit. And you will believe me when I say, my dear *parroco,* that I do not look my best on such occasions."

Torquemada shook his head, mournfully. It was by no means the first time that he had suspected his popular colleague of being a lukewarm Christian.

Chapter XLV

The market-place was filled to over-brimming. Everybody discussed the near events in the Court of Justice. It promised to be a bad day for Signor Malipizzo. And yet people could not help admitting how clever he had been to lock up those Russians. It was the best thing he could have done under the circumstances. It proved his freedom from anti-Catholic prejudices. It made him look icily objective.

Torquemada, on hearing that the prisoner's gold coin corresponded with those others which had been in the possession of the murdered man, thought it deplorable. Here was plain evidence of his cousin's guilt! Most deplorable. Still, the victim being not only a foreigner but a Protestant was a considerable mitigation of the offence from the moral and religious point of view, and possibly from the legal one as well. Anyhow, what did legal aspects matter? Had he not engaged Don Giustino? Innocent or

guilty, the prisoner would be released. And, on second thoughts, he discovered him to be worthy of the great man's golden eloquence. He was not altogether a fool. There was a touch of manliness about him; he was decidedly a brighter lad than he looked. He deserved to be released.

Ten o'clock sounded.

The Court had never been so crowded. There was barely standing room. Sunlight poured in through the windows which had not been cleaned for many long months; the atmosphere was already rather oppressive. It was a stuffy place at all times, reeking of old tobacco smoke and humanity.

Everybody was still save the old grey-headed clerk who fussed about with papers. Signor Malipizzo, after a deferential but dignified bow to the famous lawyer, had taken his seat on the raised platform facing the public whence he was wont to dispense justice. Nailed against the wall, directly over his head, was a large white paper bearing the printed words "La Legge": the law. It dominated the chamber. On one side of this could be seen a coloured portrait of the Sovereign in the bersagliere uniform; a fierce military glance shot out of his eyes from under that helmet whose plume of nodding feathers made it look three sizes too large for the head. On the other side hung a representation of the Madonna, simpering benignly in a blue tea-gown besprinkled with pearls and golden lace. The spittoon, which His Worship required continually during the audiences, was wont to be placed

immediately below this latter picture; it was the magistrate's polite freemasonish method of expressing his reverence for the Mother of God. Everybody noticed that on the present occasion this piece of furniture was located elsewhere. It stood below the Sovereign's portrait. A delicate compliment to the formidable lawyer-champion of Catholicism, sworn enemy to the House of Savoy. People commented favourably on this little detail. How artful of him! they said.

All eyes were fixed upon Don Giustino. He sat there quietly. If he was bored he certainly did not show it. Now that he was here he would give these good people a taste of his quality. He knew all about the gold coin; he was profoundly convinced of the prisoner's guilt. This was lucky for the young man. Had he thought otherwise he would probably have refused to take up the case. Don Giustino made a point of never defending innocent people. They were idiots who entangled themselves in the meshes of the law; they fully deserved their fate. Really to have murdered Muhlen was the one and only point in the prisoner's favour. It made him worthy of his rhetorical efforts. All his clients were guilty, and all of them got off scot free. "I never defend people I can't respect," he used to say.

He began his speech in a rambling, desultory sort of fashion and quite a low tone of voice, as if he were addressing a circle of friends.

A charming place, Nepenthe! He would carry away the pleasantest memories of its beauty and

the kindliness of its inhabitants. It was like a terrestrial paradise, so verdant, so remote from all danger. And yet nothing on earth was secure. That volcanic eruption the other day—what a scare it must have given them! What a lucky escape they had, thanks to the Divine intervention of the Patron Saint! Hardly any damage done; no victims worth mentioning. The fertile fields were intact; mothers and fathers and children could once more go out to their daily tasks and return in the evening, tired but happy, to gather round the family board. Family life, the sacred hearth! It was the pride, the strength, the mainstay of the country; it was the source whence the rising generation drew their earliest notions of piety and right conduct. Nothing in the world could replace home influence, the parents' teaching example—nothing! And this poor boy, now threatened with imprisonment, had a mother. He had a mother. Did the Court appreciate the import of those words? Did they realize what it meant to shatter that hallowed bond, to deprive the parent of her offspring's help and consolation—the child of its mother's fostering care? Let them consider the lives of all those great men of the past who were known to have had mothers—Themistocles, Dante, Virgil, Peter the Hermit and Madame de Maintenon—why had they achieved distinction in the world? What was the secret of their greatness? A mother's affectionate guidance in youth. They had not been torn, as children, from her loving arms.

A good many people were already sobbing. But the orator had noticed that something was wrong. He consulted a small scrap of paper and then continued in the same conversational tones as before.

He had no mother. He was an orphan. An orphan! Did the Court realize what it meant? No, he dared not ask them to picture to themselves all that was implied in that bitter word. An orphan. Nobody to instil those early lessons of piety . . . to grow up wild, neglected, despised. . . . It was impossible for a man to avoid going astray in such terribly unnatural conditions. Everybody else had parents to counsel and direct them; he alone was bereft of this blessing. It was cruel, it was illogical, to apply the same standard to him as to those fortunate other ones. Let the Court call to mind the names of those who had deviated from the narrow path of duty; did they not all belong to this unhappy class? It might safely be inferred that they had no mothers! Such persons were to be pitied and helped, rather than condemned for what was the fault not of their natures but of their anomalous situation in life. To rescue a motherless young soul from the brink of perdition was the noblest task of a Christian. And this was still, thank Heaven, a Christian country, despite the ever-swelling invasion of that irreligious foreign element which threatened to break up the old faith in God. The Madonna was still worshipped; together with the Saints. Their precious relics and other holy amulets still proved their efficacy in the hour of danger.

Amulets—ah, that reminded him.

To kill a man with a view to possessing yourself of his substance was an unpardonable crime. Now what had this boy done? Let them take the so-called robbery first. Well, no robbery had been committed, in spite of the notorious fact that this Protestant, this foreigner was known to be loaded with money. His client had fought down the temptation, the almost irresistible temptation, of appropriating the gold. Let them remember that! The minutest investigation failed to reveal anything save a single coin which he had attached to a string and hung about his neck. Motives, not deeds! What were his motives for this strange act? An unconscious application of the homœopathic principle. He had taken it as a safeguard, an amulet, in the childish belief that it might protect him on future occasions against insults such as those he had undergone.

Then, while the audience were still puzzling what the last words meant, he suddenly indulged in one of those abrupt transitions for which he was famous, and burst out:

"Down with foreigners! We Catholics know what foreigners are, how they work for evil in places high and low. One cannot take up a daily paper without seeing some exposure of their many-sided viciousness. They contaminate the land with their godless depravity. Nobody can count on immunity. The highest officials in the land, the very Ministers of the Crown, are subjected to their vile

disguised attempts at bribery and corruption; no humble peasant girl, no child, is safe from the befoulment of their filthy minds. We know them—our police records, the archives of our Courts of Justice, testify to their demoralizing agency. A pest, a contagion! Who can tell what proposals were made in this particular case—what degrading proposals, backed by the insidious offer of foreign gold? A weak character might have succumbed. But the victim was made of different stuff. He belonged to another type—the heroic type. Suffering anguish of soul, he yet preferred honour to baseness. In self-defence——"

At this point the great Deputy ceased to speak. Signor Malipizzo had swooned away. He had to be carried out of Court.

It mattered little, for the proceedings were at an end, save for a few formalities. The case was won.

People were rather annoyed at being deprived of one of Don Giustino's far-famed perorations. It could not be helped. Better luck next time. Then they asked themselves why the Judge had fainted. Some thought it might be the heat, or a touch of his old complaint. The majority were agreed that the attack was due to the Deputy's eloquence. And it was true that he was greatly impressed by the speech, but not quite as much as all that. He had decided to faint at a critical moment, for the sake of appearances. It was clever of him. He did it beautifully too; he had been rehearsing half the night. Don Giustino, on his part, shared the

common opinion and was charmed with this tribute to his genius. Altogether, the local judge had made a favourable impression on him; his attitude had been irreproachably correct. He was not a bad fellow, for a freemason. One might do worse than leave him in possession of his present appointment on Nepenthe.

The Deputy freed his prisoner; it was unavoidable. But the Russians remained in gaol, and this was always something to the credit of Signor Malipizzo. . . .

Chapter XLVI

Madame Steynlin, on hearing of Peter the Great's arrest, was stricken dumb. She wept the bitterest tears of all her life. Then, with returning calmness, she remembered Mr. Keith whose friendship with the magistrate was the common talk of the place. Would he be able to do anything? Impulsive by nature, she called on that gentleman and poured out her griefs to him. Mr. Keith was sympathetic. He declared he understood perfectly. He promised to do his utmost, that very day.

The Master, meanwhile, languished in prison. He had nobody to take his part, not even among the Little White Cows; the new section, that clique of young extremists, were only too delighted to have him out of the way. The communal doctor alone interceded on his behalf, imploring the judge in the name of the sacred brotherhood of freemasons that he, the Messiah, should be excarcerated in order that he, the physician, might be enabled to continue

the daily treatment to which the old man had grown accustomed and for which he was being regularly remunerated. "Think of my wife and children!" he said to the magistrate.

Signor Malipizzo on this occasion did not mean to be baulked of his prey. He was in bad humour; Don Giustino had got on his nerves. By means of a lightning-like discharge of symbols intelligible only to the Elect he retorted that a physician who depended for his livelihood upon a legitimate practice among *bona fide* patients was not fit to be a freemason.

Then the doctor urged the humanitarian aspects of the case. The old man needed the treatment which could be given in prison just as well; the fees would doubtless be paid sooner or later.

The Magistrate proved inexorable, adamantine. What was good enough for a native, he argued, was good enough for a vicious old alien. A stomach-pump in prison! What more? They would be wanting fried fish and asparagus next.

As a special concession to the Master's age and rank a separate upper chamber, described as very airy, had been allotted to him in the local gaol. The poor old man did not know how he got there; they had thrust him into this strange place and locked the door on him. Long hours had passed. He sat on an uncomfortable cane-bottomed chair, his hands folded across his stomach. There was already a slight sense of oppression in that region of his body. His head, too, felt heavy. Without knowing how

or why, he had fallen into a trap, after the manner of some dumb beast of earth. When would they take him out again? And when would that kind gentleman with the machine arrive?

Daylight entered through a small but thickly grated window. Looking out from where he sat, he could detect neither men nor houses nor trees—nothing but four rectangular patches of deep blue. The sea! Often had he wondered about the sea, and why it was there. It had ever been an enigma to him, this purposeless mass of water. Not even good to drink. He knew nothing of those fables of the pagans—of old Poseidon and white-armed Leucothea and the blithe crew of Triton and silver-footed Thetis moving upon the placid sunlit waters; nothing of that fair sea-born goddess whose beauty swayed the hearts of men. His Venus ideals had been of a more terrestrial nature—the wives or daughters of army generals and state functionaries who desired advancement, and sometimes got it.

Not even good to drink! There was nothing like this in Holy Russia. God would never have allowed it. The uselessness of this sea had always been to him a source of perplexity and even vague apprehension. The spectacle of this shining immensity troubled his world-scheme. Why did God create water, when land would have been so much more useful? Often had he puzzled on the subject. . . . Why?

But now, in the evening of his life and the extremity of his anguish, the truth was made mani-

fest. A Revelation drew nigh. It just came to him.

The fishes.

It was a dying gleam of intelligence, his last inspired thought, his swan-song. How else could the fishes live save in the water? All these long years he had remained ignorant of the truth. Ah, if only his disciples were at hand, to jot it down into that *Golden Book!*

But why—why must the fishes live in water? And why so much water for so few fishes? Why cannot fishes live on land? Then everybody would be satisfied. Inscrutable are the ways of God. . . .

And his glazed eye moved wearily from that disquieting expanse of blue along the wall of his chamber which had once been white and was now scrawled over with obscene jests and drawings, product of the leisure hours of generations of prisoners. The writing, like all writing, was unintelligible to him. But some of the artistic efforts left little to the imagination. He was saddened, less by homely pictures than by the unfamiliar script. He had always distrusted the written word. Why all these strange letterings—so unnecessary, so dangerous to the life of an orthodox Christian? What one brother has to tell another—why write it down?

He saw the straw pallet destined for his nocturnal repose. It reminded him dimly of a similar resting-place during his monastic life. Then, too, he had slept on a couch near the floor. Flickering visions came to him of those days, so long ago, ere yet the First Revelation was given to the world. A breath

of old Russia was wafted into his nostrils. He remembered the lusty, jovial country folk, the songs and dances at hay-making, the fragrance of the land, the sluggish rivers rolling their brown mud about the plains, the mild long-drawn evenings. He felt again that all-pervading charm of sadness, of tender yearning, that hangs in the pale Russian sky and penetrates to the very soul of the endless country.

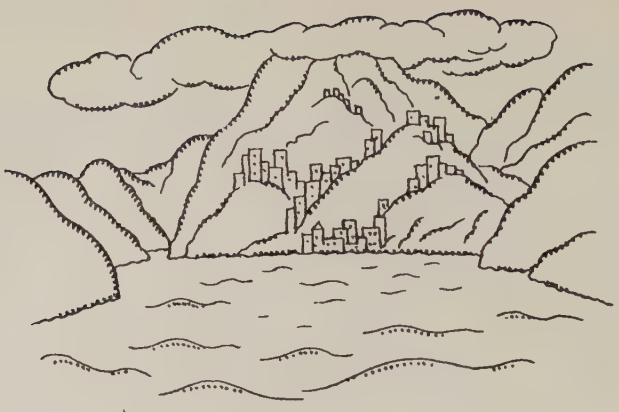
Gloomy autumn days—wet leaves and lowering horizons. The long winter within doors. Faces appeared to him, faces of old, an endless procession of faces clear-cut as ever . . . his brother monks, bearded and unkempt . . . debauched acolytes . . . pilgrims from the Holy Land . . . glittering festal robes . . . vodka orgies, endless chants and litanies, holy lamps burning, sombre eikons with staring eyes . . . the smell of greasy lukewarm cabbage soup, of unwashed bodies and boot leather and incense. Holy Russia—it all moved before his eyes in a kind of melodious twilight. Then the First Revelation. The Man-God.

Man-God. The word filtered through his intelligence. How strange it sounded. The Man-God—what could it mean?

A sudden change. A life of glory and intrigue. Food on platters of gold, sparkling wines and laughter. A diamond cross, an imperial gift, the reward of faithful services. Everybody cringing. Showers of bribes. Women—always women. A divine life! Nothing but women. . . .

Darkness. Something had happened; they had carried him into a place full of endless penances, floggings, starvings. Then they accused him of doing wrong. What was it? The flesh of warm-blooded beasts. . . . He had preferred the service of God to that of his earthly master. For this they banished him and made him suffer. He was dying now—dying to save mankind. He was giving up his life for sinners. Someone else had once done the same thing. Who was it? He could not remember. People who read and write—they know these things. Some saint, possibly; or at least a man from another province—someone he had never met or spoken to. A good Russian, whoever it was. But the name—the name had slipped out of his mind. He always had a good memory for faces, but a bad one for names.

He was so ill and oppressed too. Worse than before. He felt himself rotting earthwards, like a fungus of his own native forests under autumn rains. His body remained inert but his eye, roaming away from the straw pallet, fixed itself upon the door. When, when would that kindly gentleman with the instrument arrive?



Chapter XLVII

Concerning the life and death of Saint Eulalia, patroness of Nepenthean sailors, we possess ample and accurate information.

She was born in 1712 at a remote village in the Spanish province of Estramadura. Various divine portents accompanied her birth. Her mother dreamed a strange dream about a sea-serpent; her father was cured of a painful gouty affection; the image of Saint James of Compostella in the local church was observed to smile benignly at the very hour of her entry into the world. At the age of two years and eleven months she took the vow of chastity. Much difficulty was experienced in keeping the infant alive; she tormented her body in so merciless a fashion. She refused to partake of food save once in every five weeks; she remained immovable "like a statue" for months on end; she wore under her rough clothing iron spikes which were found, after death, to have entered deeply into her

flesh. She was never known to use a drop of water for purposes of ablution or to change her underwear more than once a year, and then only at the order of her confessor who was obliged to be in daily contact with her. The heat of her body was such that it could not be touched by human hands. During her frequent trances she spoke accurately in sixty-nine different languages; there was no hair whatever on her head which was "spotless as an egg." She put baskets of sea urchins into her bed and, as a penance for what she called "her many sins," forced herself to catch the legions of vermin that infested her brown blanket, count them, separate the males from the females, set them free once more, and begin over again. She died at the age of fourteen years and two months. Her corpse forthwith became roseate in colour, exhaled a delicious odour of violets for twenty weeks, and performed countless miracles. On dissection, a portrait of Saint James of Compostella was discovered embedded in her liver.

Saint Eulalia appeared too late to find her proper niche in Monsignor Perrelli's *Antiquities* or to be commemorated in some worthy architectural monument by the Good Duke Alfred; too late—and this is doubtless a lucky circumstance—to become the victim of one of Father Capocchio's offensive sneers. Whoever is interested in her saintly career may purchase at Nepenthe, for the small sum of sixpence, an admirable biography by a young Canon of the Church, Don Giacinto Mellino. It gives a full

account of her life and of those nine hundred and seventy-two miracles of hers which have been authenticated by eye-witnesses. No need, therefore, to expatiate further.

It stands to reason that Mr. Eames possessed a copy of this treatise. An ideal annotator, he rarely indulged in speculation; his business was to discover and co-ordinate references. Nevertheless, in regard to the earthly life of this particular saint, he used to say: "There are some things a man cannot help puzzling about." It irked him—her success on Nepenthe. He knew the sailor-men to be a horny-handed, sceptical, worldly brood. Why had they imported the cult of Eulalia from Spain; why had they chosen for their patroness a mawkish suffering nonentity, so different from those sunny goddesses of classical days? He concluded, lamely, that there was an element of the child in every southerner; that men, refusing to believe what is improbable, reserve their credulity for what is utterly impossible; in brief, that the prosaic sea-folk of Nepenthe were like everybody else in possessing a grain of stupidity in their composition—"which does not bring us much further," he would add. . . .

At the time of this year's festival Mr. Eames was supremely happy. Another pamphlet had come into his hands, an anonymous pamphlet making fun of the Duchess whose reception into the Roman Church had been fixed for the day of Saint Eulalia's festival. It bore the objectionable title "The Dipping of the Duchess" and had presumably been

indited by some wag at the Alpha and Omega Club who disapproved of water in every shape, even for baptismal purposes. The stuff was printed on the sly and hastily circulated about the island—some people maintained that Mr. Richards, the respectable Vice-President of that institution, was its author. It was a scurrilous anti-Catholic leaflet, grossly personal and savouring of atheism. The Duchess, on hearing of it—everything got about on Nepenthe—was so distressed that she decided to cancel, or at least postpone, the ceremony of her public conversion. At a meeting of urgency convened by the priests, who were bitterly disappointed at her attitude, it was agreed that this was no time for half-measures. A round sum of money was voted wherewith to buy back the pernicious pamphlet from its respective owners with a view to its destruction.

In the space of a single day every copy vanished from the island—every copy save one, which had found its way into Mr. Eames' collection. He meant to keep that copy. He would have died sooner than yield it up. When the clerical deputation arrived at his villa with soft words and promises of more solid lucre, he professed the uttermost amazement at their quest. Mr. Eames, the soul of honesty, the scorner of all subterfuge and crooked dealing, put on a new character. He lied like a trooper. He lied better than a trooper; that is to say, not only forcefully but convincingly. He lied as only a lover of bibliographical curios can lie, in defence

of his treasure. He thanked them for their courteous visit and bade them keep their gold. He professed himself a poor recluse innocent of the world's ways and undesirous of riches, adding, as a mere after-thought, that he had not so much as heard of the noxious broad-sheet in question. There must be some mistake. Society people might know something about it; that gentleman who called himself a bishop for example, that sallow gentleman from Africa, who spent so much of his time in social gaieties—he might very likely have received a copy. If they wished, he would gladly make enquiries, discreet enquiries, about the matter.

It was Mr. Eames' second lapse from grace. Gentlemen do not tell falsehoods. He did not want to be a gentleman just then. He wanted that pamphlet.

The reverend visitors withdrew convinced, amid showers of compliments and apologies. After seeing them safely off the premises and even, for greater security, half-way down the hill, Mr. Eames returned, drew out the jewel from where it lay in a secret hiding-place among others of its kind, and hugged it to his heart. He purposed to reproduce the pamphlet *in extenso,* in that particular appendix to his edition of Perrelli's *Antiquities* which dealt with "Contemporary Social History.". . .

Mr. Heard knew nothing of all this as, jostled among the crowd, he watched the procession on that bright morning. It reminded him of the feast of Saint Dodekanus which he had witnessed twelve

days earlier; it was even more extravagant. But he now felt himself seasoned to this kind of display. Besides, he had seen funnier things in Africa; though not much funnier. Once more his thoughts went back to those laughing black people; he remembered all of them—the Wabitembes, the M'tezo, the Kizibubi—what a set of jovial ruffians! How they would have enjoyed this sunshiny nonsense. And the Bulangas. Really, those Bulangas—

There was a light touch on his shoulder. He turned, and found himself face to face with Mrs. Meadows. She was smiling and looking ever so happy.

"Well, Tommy!" she said. "You don't seem to be very pleased to see me. Why haven't you come to tea lately? And why are you looking so glum? He's got his leave, after all. I had a cable two days ago. He'll pick me up here in a fortnight or three weeks. Aren't you glad you needn't escort me to England?"

"Awfully glad!" he replied, trying to be jocular. The words stuck in his throat. He had expected to meet—if he met her at all—a skulking contrite criminal. This woman was jubilant. An amazing, terrifying state of affairs.

"There is something the matter with you, Tommy. Perhaps you have caught my headache. You remember how inquisitive you were? And how you complained of the roses? If you come up now you will find fresh ones waiting for you."

Her glance was unclouded. No human being

ever looked less conscience-stricken. It was as though she had convinced herself of the righteousness of her deed, and thereafter dismissed it from her mind as something not worth bothering about. Blithe as a bird! If he had not seen with his own eyes——

"Has it gone, your headache?" he enquired, not knowing what to say.

"Gone away altogether. I have heard so much about this procession that I thought I would drive down and have a look at it. I missed the last one, you know. Besides, I wanted to see some friends here whom I've been neglecting lately. I feel quite guilty about it," she added.

He could not help saying:

"You don't look guilty."

"Ah, but you mustn't judge by appearances!"

"You blamed the sirocco, I remember."

"I don't blame it any longer. Surely a woman can change her mind? But what is the matter with you?"

"Perhaps the south wind," he ventured.

She remarked laughingly:

"I don't believe the wind is in the south at all. But you always were a funny boy, Tommy. If you are very good you will see some pretty fireworks presently. As for myself, I shall have to drive home for Baby's early dinner."

"Fireworks in broad daylight?" he asked. "That is something new."

"In broad daylight! Aren't they queer people?

They can't wait till it gets dark, I suppose."

At that moment they were joined by Keith and three or four others. He had no more chance of speaking to her alone; she drove away, not long afterwards, waving her parasol at him and leaving him in a state of dazed perplexity.

He had been thinking night and day about his cousin, certain of her criminality and profoundly convinced of her moral rectitude. What had Muhlen done? He had probably threatened her with some exposure. He was her legal husband—he could make himself abominable to her and to Meadows. The future of the child, too, was imperilled. He might be able to claim it; or if not that—the bishop's notions of bastardy laws were not very clear—he could certainly rely upon his friend the Magistrate to take the child out of the mother's custody or do something horrible of that kind. The happiness of that whole family was at his mercy. She had been goaded to desperation. Mr. Heard began to understand. To understand—that was not enough. Anybody could understand.

Keith took his arm and remarked:

"Come and see my cannas! They are perfect just now. I must tell you a story about them—it's the wildest romance. I am the only person in Europe who understands the proper cultivation of cannas. I shall have scented ones soon."

"Don't they smell?" enquired the bishop absent-mindedly.

"Not yet. You are looking a little tired, Heard,

as if you had not slept well lately. Perhaps you would like to sit down? We can watch the fireworks from the terrace. You ought to read Pepys' Diary. That is what I have been doing. I am also rather low-spirited just now. The end of another spring, you know—it always makes me feel sad. Pepys is the antidote. He is a tonic. Every Englishman ought to be compelled, for the good of his soul, to go through Pepys once in three years."

"I must read him again," said the bishop who was not particularly interested in the diarist just then.

"His universal zest! It seems to be extinct nowadays; it is a charm that I have not discovered in any living Englishman. What a healthy outlook! Not a trace of straining anywhere. He took life with both hands. How he threw himself into his work, his amusements, his clothes and women and politics and food and theatres and pictures. Warm heart, cool head. So childlike, and yet so wise. There's only one thing that troubles me about him —his love of music. It was so obviously sincere. He not only liked it; he actually understood it. Music, to me, is a succession of sounds more or less painful. I can't even whistle. It's too bad."

The bishop said:

"If the lives of all of us were written down with the same remorseless candour, how few would stand the test."

He was thinking of the Devil's Rock.

"I don't trouble about tests," replied Keith. "The whole herd of humanity adapts its pace to that of

the weakest lamb. The capacity of the weakest lamb—that is the test. I don't consider myself bound to such a vulgar standard. And how spectacular we are, in matters of so-called right and wrong. That is because we have painfully cultivated the social conscience. Posing, and playing to the gallery! Mankind is curiously melodramatic, my dear fellow; full of affected reverence for its droll little institutions. As if anybody really cared what another person does! As if everybody were not chuckling inwardly all the time!"

"Surely there are heights and depths in the matter of conduct?"

"I don't trouble about heights and depths. Does it not all depend upon where we take up our stand? Must we always remain stationary like vegetables? A bird knows nothing of heights and depths. You sit here at night-time and look at the stars. They are firm-fixed, you say. Well, they are not firm-fixed. Therefore it is the wrong way to look at them. I have also written a diary, Heard. It is my legacy to posterity and will be published after my death. It relates of actions not all of which Count Caloveglia would call pretty. Perhaps it will give some people the courage of their unspoken convictions."

The bishop suddenly asked:

"If somebody you knew had committed a crime, what would you say? Somebody you really respect —a person like Mrs. Meadows?"

"Your cousin? I should say that whatever Mrs.

Meadows does is well done."

"You would approve?"

"Of course I would. People like that are bound to be in the right."

"Really . . . ?"

The fireworks were splendid; altogether, Saint Eulalia's day proved a tremendous success. The festal joy was only marred by the unseemly behaviour of Miss Wilberforce, who profited by the occasion to let off some fireworks, or at least steam, of her own.

In broad daylight too.

This was something new, and rather ominous.

The dear lady was becoming quite a problem.

Chapter XLVIII

Men looked down from the market-place that afternoon and beheld a gaily-coloured throng moving about Madame Steynlin's awkwardly situated promontory. Her house and its wide terrace overhanging the sea were filled with guests. The entertainment differed from the receptions of the Duchess. It was more rustic and unrestrained—more in the nature of a picnic. Everything possible had been done to convert that tongue of land, that refractory stretch of trachyte, into a garden. Paths were blasted through the rock; those few scarred olives, the aboriginals, had been supplemented by whatever flowers and shade-giving trees could be induced, with assiduous waterings, to strike roots into the arid soil. It was still rather a transparent place.

A number of new people had lately arrived on Nepenthe in favour of whom the hostess, with the frank cordiality of her nature, had issued invitations broadcast. There was the celebrated R. A.

and his dowdy wife; a group of American politicians who were supposed to be reporting on economic questions and spent their Government's money in carousing about Europe; Madame Albert, the lady doctor from Lyons whose unique combination of magic and massage (a family secret) had brought the expiring Prince of Philipopolis to life again; an Italian senator with his two pretty daughters; a bluff hilarious Scotchman, Mr. Jameson who, as a matter of fact, had done seven years for forgery but did not like to have it brought up against him; some sisters of charity; a grizzled sea-captain who was making discreet enquiries about a safe place for a shipwreck, having been promised by the owners twenty per cent of his vessel's insurance money; a dilapidated Viscount and his *soi-disant* niece; two fluffy Danish ladies who always travelled together and smiled at everything, though the younger one smiled in such a horribly knowing fashion that you could not help disliking her; Mrs. Roger Rumbold who addressed meetings to advocate Infanticide for the Masses; Mr. Bernard of the Entomological Society—author of *The Courtship of Cockroaches;* another young man of pleasant exterior who was held to be an architect because his brother used to be employed in a well-known engineering firm; and several more.

The exclusive Mr. Eames was absent. He sat at home, thinking how narrowly he had escaped imprisonment at the hands of Signor Malipizzo, in connection with Muhlen's disappearance. The

closest shave of all his life! It showed how right Keith had been in bidding him keep on the right side of the law—on the right side of the judge—rather than trust to the promptings of a "good conscience." The Duchess likewise sent her excuses. She was so troubled about the pamphlet that Don Francesco hardly dared to leave her side. He, therefore, was also absent; so was the bereaved Commissioner. Mrs. Meadows had driven home again long ago. Van Koppen intended to sail in the early hours of next morning. The bishop and Denis were likewise on the verge of departure. A break-up was at hand.

Mr. Keith alone refused to budge. He was waiting for the first cicada whose strident call was due, he declared, in a week's time. Till then he proposed to remain on Nepenthe.

"Fancy waiting for an insect," said his friend van Koppen. "I believe, Keith, you've got a sentimental streak somewhere."

"I have been fighting against it all my life. A man ought to dominate his reflexes. But if the insect keeps good time—why not?"

He was in an elegiac mood, though he meant to drive away his cares later in the evening by the "Falernian system." He felt the exodus in the air. Another spring drawing to its close—everybody scattering! He was filled, too, with that peculiar pensiveness which troubles complex people when they have done a kindly act. Virtue had gone out of him.

He had wrought a miracle.

The moist look in the eye of his hostess testified to the miracle; so did her frock which, being of pink muslin, harmonized with the state of her mind but not with her complexion. Peter the Great had escaped from prison. Not only he, but all the others were at liberty once more, including the Messiah who, after some attentions on the part of the communal doctor, had been put to bed like a little child. The rest of them filled her trim walks with their gleeful laughter and bright raiment; they devoured abundant wines and food at those refreshment tables which groaned under the weight of good things. One could trust Madame Steynlin to attend to the commissariat department. She knew how to gladden the human heart. That of Peter the Great was gladdened to such an extent that he soon began to perform a Russian peasant dance, a *pas seul,* to the delight of the assembled guests. It was a cheery interlude with a disastrous ending, for the rough terrace being different from what he expected, he stumbled and fell full length upon the ground. There he lay, laughing, like a young giant refreshed with wine.

"I don't know how you have done it, Mr. Keith," she said, "and I am not going to ask. But I shall never forget this kindness of yours."

"Would you not do the same for me? I imagine, between ourselves, that the judge has been a good deal flustered with this trial and the intervention of Don Giustino. Perhaps he lost his head. We are

all liable to that, are we not? He is a nervous man; but quite a good fellow if one keeps on the right side of him. It is so easy to keep on the right side of people. I often wonder, Madame Steynlin, why men are so full of bitterness towards each other. It is one of the things I shall never live to understand. And another is this problem of music! Will you help me to grasp the pleasure which you seem to derive from it? Helmholtz does not bring me much further. He explains why certain sounds are necessarily disagreeable——"

"Oh, Mr. Keith! You would go to a professor. I fear you are not very musical. Have you never felt inclined to cry?"

"I have. But not in a concert-room."

"Nor yet in a theatre?"

"Never," he replied, "though it saddens me a little to see grown-up men and women stalking about in funny dressing-gowns and pretending to be kings and queens. When I watch *Hamlet* or *Othello,* I say to myself: 'This stuff is nicely riveted together. But, in the first place, the story is not true. And secondly, it is no affair of mine. Why cry about it?' "

"That looks as if you were heartless and unimaginative. And you so compassionate! I do not understand you. I do not understand myself either. We are always groping about in the dark, are we not? We are always puzzling about our own problems instead of helping other people with theirs. Perhaps one should not think so much of oneself,

though it is an interesting subject. Tell me, if music says nothing to you, why not leave it alone?"

"Because I want to be able to extract pleasure from it, as you do. That is what makes me curious. I like to understand things, because then I can begin to enjoy them. I think knowledge should intensify our pleasures. That is its aim and object, so far as I am concerned. What are other joys—those of the illiterate and incurious? A dog scratching his fleas in the sunshine. They too are not wholly to be despised——"

"What a dreadful simile!"

"A precise one."

"You like to be precise?"

"It is my mother's fault. She brought me up so carefully."

"I think that is a pity, Mr. Keith. If I had children I would let them run wild. People are too tame nowadays. That is why so few of them have any charm. These poor Russians—no one tries to understand them. Why is everybody so much alike? Because we never follow our feelings. And yet, what is a surer guide than the heart? We seem to live in a world of echoes."

"A world of masks, Madame Steynlin. It is the only theatre worth looking at. . . ."

The lady was too happy to consider how the miracle had been wrought, though she suspected dirty work at the bottom of it. She never discovered how simple had been the method of Mr. Keith who had merely given His Worship to under-

stand that he had done enough bribing for one season and that, unless Krasnojabkin were promptly released, there would be no bribing whatever next year. The judge, with his usual legal acumen, perceived the cogency of his friend's argument. He met Mr. Keith's wishes more than half-way. On an impulse of downright good-nature—there was no other interpretation to be put on it—he released all the Russians, including the Messiah. They were excarcerated then and there on a decree of "provisional liberty," which looked well in the records of the Court and, being interpreted, signified immunity from further judicial molestation. The incident was closed.

People talked about it none the less. They discussed Don Giustino, his past career and present prosperity. As for Mr. Muhlen—he was already almost forgotten. So was the Commissioner's lady. Madame Steynlin alone brought herself to say a few kind words about both of them. She was ready to say kind things about anyone. The magic of love! Her heart, under the influence of Peter, had opened so wide as to embrace not only the Russian colony, but even the nine thousand families of Chinese cultivators who, according to a paragraph in the morning's newspaper, had perished in a sudden inundation of the Hoang-Ho.

The poor people! she said. She did not see why one should not sympathize with the griefs of a Chinaman. Humble honest folks, without a doubt —swept off the face of the earth, through no fault

of their own, by a cataclysm! There was quite a discussion about it on her terrace that afternoon.

Mr. Heard, feeling also very charitable, found himself taking her part against someone who said it was impossible to sympathize with the troubles of a yellow man—they were too different, too remote from ourselves. He thought that much individual hardship had been suffered, undeserved, unchronicled; homes destroyed, children drowned before the eyes of their parents. And nobody seemed to care.

Chapter XLIX

Later on, he turned his back upon the crowded walks and found himself on a remote terrace overlooking the sea. It was quiet here, in view of the sunset—his last sunset on Nepenthe.

Leaning over the parapet he enjoyed, once more, the strangely intimate companionship of the sea. He glanced down into the water whose uneven floor was diapered with long weedy patches, fragments of fallen rock, and brighter patches of sand; he inhaled the pungent odour of sea-wrack and listened to the breathings of the waves. They lapped softly against the rounded boulders which strewed the shore like a flock of nodding Behemoths. He remembered his visits at daybreak to the beach—those unspoken confidences with the sunlit element to whose friendly caresses he had abandoned his body. How calm it was, too, in this evening light. Near at hand, somewhere, lay a sounding cave; it sang a melody of moist content. Shadows lengthened;

fishing boats, moving outward for their night-work, steered darkly across the luminous river at his feet. Those jewel-like morning tints of blue and green had faded from the water; the southern cliff-scenery, projections of it, caught a fiery glare. Bastions of flame. . . .

The air seemed to have become unusually cool and bracing.

Here, on a bench all by himself, sat Count Caloveglia. As the bishop took a seat beside him they exchanged a few words. The Italian, so affable as a rule, was rather preoccupied and disinclined for talk.

Mr. Heard remembered his first encounter with that old man—the Salt of the South, as Keith had called him. It was at those theatricals in the Municipality. Then, too, the Count had been remarkably silent, his chin reposing in his hand, absorbed in the spectacle—in the passionate grace of the young players. He was absorbed in another spectacle now —the old sun, moving in passionless splendour down the sky.

Only a fortnight ago, that first meeting. Less than a fortnight. Twelve days. How much had been crammed into them!

A kind of merry nightmare. Things happened. There was something bright and diabolical in the tone of the place, something kaleidoscopic,—a frolicsome perversity. Purifying, at the same time. It swept away the cobwebs. It gave you a measure, a standard, whereby to compute earthly affairs.

Another landmark passed; another milestone on the road to enlightenment. That period of doubt was over. His values had righted themselves. He had carved out new and sound ones; a workable, up-to-date theory of life. He was in fine trim. His liver—he forgot that he ever had one. Nepenthe had done him good all round. And he knew exactly what he wanted. A return to the Church, for example, was out of the question. His sympathies had outgrown the ideals of that establishment; a wave of pantheistic benevolence had drowned its smug little teachings. The Church of England! What was it still good for? A stepping-stone, possibly, towards something more respectable and humane; a warning to all concerned of the folly of idolizing dead men and their delusions. The Church? Ghosts!

His thoughts wandered to England. Often had he sighed, in Africa, for its drowsy verdant opulence—those willow-fringed streamlets and grazing cattle, the smell of hay, the flowery lanes, the rooks cawing among the slumberous elms; often had he thought of that village on the hill-top with its grey steeple. Well, he would see them all in a few days. And how would England compare with the tingling realism of Nepenthe? Rather parochial, rather dun; grey-in-grey; subdued light above—crepuscular emotions on earth. Everything fireproof, seaworthy. Kindly thoughts expressed in safe unvarying formulas. A guileless people! Ships tossing at sea; minds firmly anchored to the commonplace. Abundance for the body; diet for the spirit. The

monotony of a nation intent upon respecting laws and customs. Horror of the tangent, the extreme, the unconventional. God save the King.

So much the better. This soulful cult of tradition, this clinging to the obvious and genteel as if it were an anchor of safety—it nipped in the bud the monster-making faculty of low horizons and bleak, wintry stretches of earth. Bazhakuloff! Those Russians, it struck him, had been providentially sent to Nepenthe for his delectation and instruction. He was glad to have beheld a type of this nature, inconceivable in England. That grotesque, with three million followers! It had been a liberal education to look into his vacuous face, into those filmy eyes dripping with saintliness and alcohol. The Little White Cows! Chimæras, engendered in hyperborean mists.

And still Count Caloveglia said nothing. He gazed at the sun, whose orb now rolled upon the rim of the horizon. Slowly it sank, fusing the water into a golden pool. A hush fell upon nature. Colours fled from earth into the sky. They scattered among the clouds. The enchantment began, overhead.

At last the old man remarked:

"I suppose that is why I am no colourist. That is why I worship the inexorable rigour of form. We of the South, Mr. Heard, are drenched in volatile beauty. . . . And yet one never wearies of these things! It is what you call a glamour, an interlude of witchcraft. Nature is a-tremble with the mi-

raculous. She beckons us to explore her strange places. She says: Tread here, my friend—and here; tread where you have never trodden before! The sage surrenders his intelligence, and grows young again. He recaptures the spirit of his boyish dreams. He peers into worlds unknown. See! Adventure and discovery are lurking on every side. These painted clouds with their floating banners and citadels, yonder mysterious headlands that creep into the landscape at this hour, those islets emerging, like flakes of bronze, out of the sunset-glow—all the wonder of the Odyssey is there!"

He spoke out of politeness and soon fell silent again. His thoughts roamed far away.

They were thoughts commensurate with the grandeur of the scene.

Count Caloveglia was no colourist. He was a sculptor, about to reap the reward of his labours. The cheque would be in his pocket that night. Three hundred and fifty thousand francs—or nearly. That is what made him not exactly grave, but reserved. Excess of joy, like all other excess, is not meet to be displayed before men. All excess is unseemly. Nothing overmuch. Measure in everything.

Measure even in the fabrication of Hellenic masterpieces. He had created one of them (the Demeter did not count); it sufficed his modest ambitions. The Faun was his first forgery, and his last. To retrieve the fortunes of his family he had employed those peculiar talents which God had given him. He would remain, henceforward, an

artist. He shrank from the idea of becoming a wholesale manufacturer of antiques.

Three hundred and fifty thousand francs. It sufficed. Thinking of those figures, he began to smile with contentment. He smiled—but no more. And as he continued to muse upon the transaction his look melted, imperceptibly, into one of reverential awe; there was a solemnity about that sum, an amplitude, a perfection of outline that reminded him, in a way, of the proportions of some wonderful old Doric temple. The labour of a lifetime would not have enabled him to collect so much, had he tried to sell bronzes of his own workmanship. A bust or statue by Count Caloveglia—it would command a certain small price, no doubt; but what was the reputation, the market value, of the most eminent modern artist as compared with that nameless but consummate craftsman of Locri?

The Count saw things in their true perspective. His mental attitude towards Sir Herbert Street and his American employer was not tinged with the faintest cloud of disrespect; for van Koppen, indeed, he cherished a liking which bordered on affection. He detected in the astute American what nobody else could detect—an element of childlike freshness and simplicity. As far apart, in externals, as two distant trees whose leaves are fluttering on either side of some entangled forest, yet felt that their roots were interwoven below ground, drawing common life and nourishment and sympathies from that old teeming soil of human aspirations.

Nor was he vainglorious of his achievement. His superiority over the art-expert he took as a gift of the gods. Vanity was abhorrent to his nature. He was not proud but glad—glad to have been able to reconquer his legitimate social position; glad, above all things, to have forged a link with the past—a key to admit him into the fellowship of Lysippus and those others whose august shades, he opined, were even then smiling upon him. The Locri Faun was his handiwork. He was "entitled to dine well," as he had told Denis. That was what he now purposed to do. One master-stroke had repaired his fortunes. It sufficed. Nothing overmuch. Count Caloveglia knew the story of Polycrates, the too-fortunate man. He knew what lies in wait for the presumptuous mortal who oversteps the boundary of what is fair and good. Nemesis!

Three hundred and fifty thousand francs. There would be an ample dowry for Matilda. And, as regards himself, he could return to his passion of youth; he could afford to become a sculptor again and even, if so disposed, a collector—though not exactly after the style of his excellent friend Cornelius van Koppen.

"That was a suggestive encounter, was it not, between the Deputy and our local judge?"

He spoke, as before, out of civility.

"Very suggestive," assented Mr. Heard. "Two blackguards, I call them."

The bishop was particularly glad to learn, as everybody on the island had learnt, the minutest

details of this sordid legal affair. It seemed likewise to have been providentially arranged, in order to afford him an insight into the administration of local law, and some notion of what would have been in store for his cousin had she applied for relief from Muhlen's persecutions to Signor Malipizzo, his intimate friend. There would have been no justice for her—not from that quarter. He would probably have forbidden the child to be moved out of his jurisdiction, pending the progress of a trial which might never end. Nor could the English Court, with its obsolete provisions on this head, have regarded Muhlen otherwise than as her legal husband—the child of her later union as illegitimate. Bastardy: a taint for life! How well she had done to put herself beyond a rancorous letter of the law; to protect her child and family according to the immutable instincts of mankind!

The Nepenthe magistrate had shown what he was capable of, in his bestial dealings with a half-witted lad and those harmless Russian lunatics—the first one saved through the intervention of a cut-throat politician, and the second . . . well, he did not exactly know how the Muscovites had been able to regain their freedom but, remembering what Keith had told him about Miss Wilberforce, her periodical imprisonments and his periodical bribes, he shrewdly suspected some underhand practices on the part of that gentleman at the instigation, very possibly, of the charming Madame Steynlin. Signor Malipizzo's cruel travesty of justice—how

unfavourably it compared with his cousin's altogether satisfactory, straightforward and business-like handling of Muhlen's little affair!

Doubtless she suffered intensely. He called to mind her looks, her voice, during that first interview at the villa Mon Repos; he thought it likely that, but for her child and husband, she would have taken her own life in order to escape from this villain. And doubtless she had weighed the matter in her own mind. Sensible people do not take steps of this gravity without reflecting on the possible consequences. She must have tried her hardest to talk Muhlen over, before coming to the conclusion that there was nothing to be done with the fellow. She knew him; she knew her own mind. She knew better than anyone else what was in store for her if Muhlen got the upper hand. Her home broken up; her child a bastard; herself and Meadows —social outcasts; all their three lives ruined. Mrs. Meadows, plainly, did not relish such a prospect. She did not see why her existence should be wrecked because a scoundrel happened to be supported by a disreputable paragraph of the Code. Muhlen was a troublesome insect. He must be brushed aside. Ridiculous to call such a thing a tragedy!

He thought of the insignificance of a human life. Thousands of decent upright folks swept away at a blow. . . . Who cared! One dirty blackmailer more or less: what on earth did it matter to anybody?

An enigma? His cousin was not an enigma at all. Keith had called her a tiger mother. That was

correct. Not every parent could do what she had done. Not every parent was placed under the necessity. Not every parent had the grit. If all of them fought for their offspring after this fashion, the race would be stronger and better. Thinking thus, he not only understood. He approved. Mrs. Meadows had saved her family. She was perfect of her kind.

Suddenly he remembered that other parent on the passenger boat when he came to Nepenthe—that ugly peasant-woman dressed in black, with the scar across her cheek—how she had tried to console her suffering child. What had Muhlen said? "Throw it into the water! It's often the only way of ridding oneself of a nuisance." Into the water. His own words. That was where he, the nuisance, had gone. It was unpleasant, maybe, to hurtle through eight hundred feet of air. But men who specialize in making themselves objectionable after Muhlen's peculiar fashion deserve all they can get. Sensible women do not put up with such nonsense, if they can help it.

One owes something to one's self, *n'est-ce pas?* Decidedly so.

Everything was clear as daylight. And he found he had bothered himself long enough about Muhlen; there were so many other interesting things on earth. A contemptible little episode! He decided to relegate it into the category of unimportant events. He was glad that the whole affair had remained in the background, so to speak, of his

Nepenthe experiences. It seemed appropriate. Odd, all the same, that the most respectable woman on the island should be a murderess.

"Dear me!" he mused. "How very queer. It never struck me in that light before. Shows how careful one must be. . . . And a relation of mine into the bargain. H'm. Some people, if they knew, would call it a compromising situation. Well, I begin to think it rather creditable than otherwise to our family. We want more women of this kind on earth. All mothers ought to be tiger mothers...."

"Don't you notice, Count, that there is an unwonted sparkle in the air this evening? Something cleansing, clarifying?"

"To be sure I do," replied the other. "And I can tell you the cause of it. Sirocco is over for the present. The wind has shifted to the north. It brightens all nature. It makes one see things in their true perspective, doesn't it?"

"That is exactly what I feel," said Mr. Heard.

Chapter L

The symposium, that evening, might have degenerated into something like an orgy but for the masterful intervention of Denis who was not going to let Keith make a fool of himself. It took place in the most famous of all the caves of Nepenthe —Luisella's grotto-tavern dedicated, by common usage, to the worship of Venus and Bacchus.

There were two or three living rooms on the surface of the ground. Walking through the first of these you clambered down some slippery stairs into what was once a breathless subterranean vault hewn out of the soft and dry pumiceous rock and used, as was customary, for storing barrels and other paraphernalia. In the course of time, as more barrels accumulated, the grotto was excavated further and further into the entrails of the island. There seemed no reason why it should ever cease growing when suddenly, one day, the perspiring workmen were struck in the face by a cool blast of wind laden

with marine moisture. They knew what this meant. They had encountered one of those mysterious and dangerous fissures that lead down to unknown depths, opening upon the world of sunshine often at the water's edge, four hundred feet below. It was deemed prudent to suspend excavations. These rents in the interior of the earth had a knack of enlarging themselves, without a word of warning, from cracks of a few inches to black gulfs several hundred feet across. The cavern ceased to grow. As a matter of fact, it turned out to be just large enough.

That current of air ventilating the grotto made the fortune of these orphan girls—Luisella and her three sisters. The barrels and other lumber once removed, the recesses became a breezy night-tavern, its natural vaulting being first white-washed and then adorned, by master-hand, with thrilling pictures of crimson fish afloat upon cærulean waves, and piles of bossy pumpkins, and birds of Paradise with streaming golden feathers, and goats at pasture among blue lilies, and horses prancing over emerald mountains, and trees laden with flowers and fruits such as no mortal had ever seen or tasted. It was an ideal place for a carousal.

They could cook, those girls. Their savoury stews and vegetable soups and fritters of every description were known far and wide. It was universally agreed that nobody could make a more appetizing mayonnaise sauce for cold fish and lobsters. No mayonnaise was quite like theirs; no, not quite. Its flavour

lingered on the palate; it haunted your memory in distant lands, like the afterglow of some happy love-affair. Nice girls, too; well-mannered; not very difficult to caress, and never jealous of each other. "It's all in the family," they used to declare.

"Am I right, then, or am I wrong?" asked Mr. Keith, whose pomposity was melting away under successive bottles of his own wine, specially imported to grace the table.

The honest Vice-President of the Club, Mr. Richards, was pretty far gone, but could always be relied upon to say something apposite. That was due to his legal training. Once a thriving solicitor, he had been struck off the rolls in consequence of some stupid trustee business which turned out all wrong and thereafter driven along devious paths known only to himself: hence his residence on Nepenthe. He replied:

"That depends entirely, my dear Sir, upon what you postulated."

"The older I get," observed Mr. van Koppen, "the more I realize that everything depends upon what a man postulates. The rest is plain sailing."

"I never heard a truer remark," said Keith, "not even from you! One has only to posit a thing, and it's done. Don't you agree, Bishop? Here is what we would call a worn-out earthenware plate. It is not a plate unless I tell it to be a plate. You may call it anything you like—it can't answer back. But we need not pursue the argument. Speaking for myself, I am feeling as comfortable as a beetle in a rose."

The Vice-President remarked:

"We all know what it means when Mr. Keith becomes horticultural in his similes. It means the same thing as when I become legal. Gentlemen! I propose to grow legal within the next half-hour or so."

"You promised to tell me the history of your cannas," said Mr. Heard.

"You were going to tell it to me too," added Denis.

"I did. I was. And I will. But let me ask you this: have you ever heard of a teetotaller conspicuous for kindliness of heart, or intellectually distinguished in any walk of life? I should be glad to know his name. A sorry crew! Not because they drink water, but because the state of mind which makes them dread alcohol is unpropitious to the hatching of any generous idea. *When men have well drunk.* I like that phrase. *When men have well drunk.* I am inclined to think that the Aramaic text has not been tampered with at this point. What do you say, Heard?"

"Nothing is more improbable," replied the bishop. "And the water, you perceive, was changed into wine; not into cocoa or lemonade. That conveys, if I am not mistaken, rather a suggestive implication."

"I have been perusing Seneca's letters. He was a cocoa-drinker, masquerading as an ancient. An objectionable hypocrite! I wish people would read Seneca instead of talking about him."

Van Koppen observed:

"What a man postulates is truer than what exists. I have grown grey in trying to make my fellow-creatures understand that realities are less convincing than make-believe."

"Given the proper atmosphere," said the bishop, laughing, "everything becomes inevitable. If you were wrong, Mr. van Koppen, where would our poets and novelists be?"

"Where are they?" queried the American.

"How shall that come out of a man," continued Mr. Heard, "which was never in him? How shall he generate a harmonious atmosphere if he be disharmonious himself? It is all a question of plausibility, of verisimi—simili——"

"I never heard a more profound remark, Koppen, no, nor a more subtle one; not even from you. Nor yet from you, Heard. And I can tell you something to the point. I was talking this afternoon with a gentleman about the stage. I said it made me sad to see flesh-and-blood people pretending to be kings and queens. Because it cannot be done. No sensible person can bring himself to believe it. But when you watch some of these local marionette theatres the illusion is complete. Why is a poppy show more convincing than the Comédie Française? Because it is still further removed from reality. There is so much make-belief that you cease to struggle. You succumb without an effort. You are quite disposed, you are positively anxious, to make concessions to the improbable. Once they are made—why, as you say, it is plain sailing."

"All life is concession to the improbable," observed the bishop rather vaguely.

Mr. Richards remarked:

"These questions must be approached with an open mind. An open mind, gentlemen, is not necessarily an empty one."

"A fine distinction!"

"Very well. Mr. Keith proposes to abolish theatres. I second the motion. Nothing is easier. Let me draw up a memorial to the House of Lords. We will appeal to them on moral grounds. I know the proper language. *Whereas by the grace of God your petitioners humbly protest that there is too much kissing on the stage*—ah! Talking of kissing, here comes our friend Don Francesco. He shall put his name to the memorial and seal it with an oath. No Englishman can resist a Monsignor. And nothing like a solemn oath. People always think you mean it."

That amiable personage strode down the stairs in dignified fashion, greeting the guests with a sonorous:

"*Pax Vobiscum!*"

He could not be induced to stay long, however. He had been perturbed all day on account of the Duchess who now threatened to join the Moravian Brotherhood; she was so annoyed about a little thing which had happened. He did not quite believe it, of course; but, like a well-trained priest, took nothing for granted and was prepared for every emergency where ladies are concerned.

"Just one glass!" said Keith.

"Let me drink to your health ere we part," added the bishop. "I am sorry to leave you. Our friendship will endure. We meet in September, during the vintage season. Keith has been talking to me. I am as wax in his hands. Your smile, Don Francesco, will follow me across the ocean. Just one glass!"

"Ah, well!" said the priest. "The next best thing to leading others astray is to be led astray oneself."

He gulped down a couple of tumblers and dutifully took his leave, turning round, as he reached the staircase, to make a playful gesture of benediction towards the assembled company.

"Don't leave your bottle half empty," Keith called after him, imploringly. "It looks untidy."

"And so unhappy," added the bishop. "Dear me! This is most singular. I seem to see two lamps instead of one. It must have been those apricots."

Keith interposed:

"Or perhaps you strained one of your eyes bathing. It has happened to me, occasionally. Darkness is the best remedy. It rests the optic nerve."

"Shall we take a turn or two outside?" asked Denis.

It was past midnight as the two climbed out of the cave into the night air. A cool north wind blew across the market-place. The bishop was filled with a sense—a clear-cut, all-convincing sense—of the screamingly funny insignificance of everything. Then he noticed the moon.

It dangled over the water, waning, sickly, moth-eaten, top-heavy, and altogether out of condition —as if it had been on duty for weeks on end. In other respects, too, its appearance was not quite normal. In fact, it soon took to behaving in the most extraordinary fashion. Sometimes there were two moons, and sometimes one. They seemed to merge together—to glide into each other, and then to separate again. Mr. Heard was vastly pleased and puzzled by the phenomenon—so pleased that he gave utterance to one of the longest speeches he had made since his arrival on Nepenthe. He said:

"I have seen many funny things here, Denis. But this is the funniest of all. The spectacle seems to have been providentially arranged, as a sort of *bonne bouche,* for my last evening on the island. Dear me. Now there are two again. And now they are behind each other once more. A kind of celestial hide and seek. Most interesting. I wish Keith could see it. Or that dear Count Caloveglia. He would be sure to say something polite. . . . The inconstant moon! I know, at last, what the poet meant by that expression, though the word inconstant strikes me as hardly forcible enough. The skittish moon, I should be inclined to call it. The skittish moon. The frivolous moon. The giddy moon. The quite-too-absurd moon. . . . There it goes again! Very curious. What can it be? . . . Why, this is the reverse of an eclipse, my boy. The disk is darkened during an eclipse. It disappears *in vacuo.* In the present case it is brightened and

rendered, so to speak, doubly apparent. What would you call the reverse of an eclipse, Denis? Anti-eclipse? That sounds rather barbaric to my ears. One should never mix Greek and Latin, if it can possibly be avoided. Well?"

"We must have a good look at this thing from your window, and then find out all about it."

"Oh, but I could not possibly take you from your friends! I know my way home perfectly well. You will not dream of accompanying me."

"Indeed I will. I walked with you to that house when you first arrived here, and helped you to unpack. Don't you remember? And now you must let me take you there on our last evening. . . ."

By the time Denis returned to the grotto a more exuberant and incoherent tone had been generated among the guests. He was not pleased. He felt inclined to be stern. A number of reprobates from the Club had dropped in, and Keith, whom he meant to keep straight for one night at least, was saying silly things and giving himself away. So was the excellent Mr. Richards.

"This is a good island," observed that gentleman. "We discourse like sages and drink like swine. Peace with Honour! . . . How that old Jew took our English measure, eh? How he laughed in his sleeve at our infatuation for a phrase like that. Peace with Honour! The sort of claptrap that makes a man feel so jolly comfortable inside, so damned satisfied with everything, like after a good feed. And that sentimental primrose business. Dizzy as flower-

expert. What cared he for primroses? Votes and moneybags was what he was after. But he knew the British Public. And that accounts for the pious domestic button-hole. Who ever heard of a Jew telling the difference between a primrose and any other kind of rose? They're not such blasted fools."

"Excuse me," said Keith, rising from his seat in an afflatus of inspiration. "Excuse me. I know the difference. It is primarily a question of nutrition. Glucose! I am a great believer in glucose. Because, even if it could be proved that the monks of Palaiokastron stripped the vine of its leaves and thereby hastened the maturing of the grape without reducing its natural supply of sugar——"

"You don't shine," interrupted Denis, "when you talk like that."

"Because even if this could be proved, which I greatly doubt, yet nothing on earth will make me believe that glucose is otherwise than beneficial to vegetation. Because——"

"Do sit down, Keith. You are monopolizing the conversation."

"Because the glucose resides within that verdant foliage like truth in her well, like the oyster within its pearl. The monks of Palaiokastron—they got it straight from Noah. I am a great believer in glucose. Which is absurd. Because——"

"Oh, shut up! You are making a perfect exhibition of yourself. Can't you oblige me, for once in the way?"

Denis was growing seriously alarmed for the rep-

utation of his friend. He had changed of late; he was beginning to know his own mind. He meant to put a stop to this humiliating scene. As the other, regardless of his pleadings, continued to babble dithyrambic nonsense concerning glucose and self-fertilization and artificial manures and inflorescences and Assyrian bas-reliefs and Stilton cheese, he suddenly gripped his arm and pulled him, with a crash, into his chair.

"Sit down, you double-distilled owl!"

This was the first virile achievement of his young life, and directed to a worthy end. For it was obvious to the meanest intelligence that Mr. Keith was considerably drunk. Too surprised to utter a word of protest, the orator paused in his declaration, beaming blandly at nobody in particular. Then he remarked, in quite a subdued tone of voice:

"We are all at the mercy of youth. Mr Richards! Could you oblige me with a fairy-tale?"

The End